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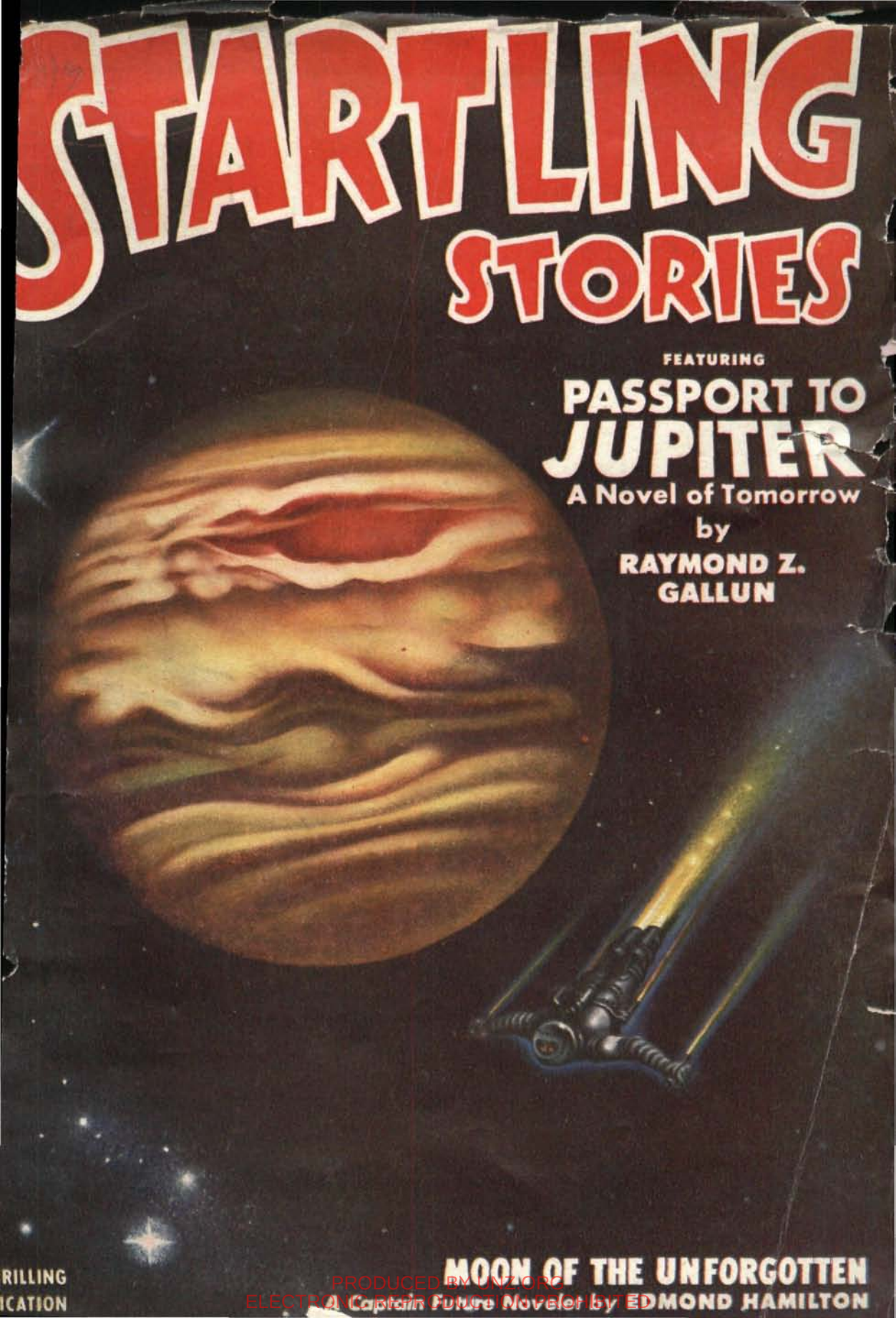
FEATURING

PASSPORT TO JUPITER

A Novel of Tomorrow

by

RAYMOND Z. GALLUN



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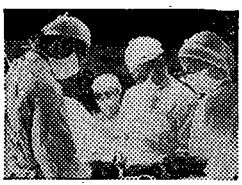

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STARTLING STORIES

Vol. 22, No. 3 A THRILLING PUBLICATION January, 1951

A Complete Novel

PASSPORT TO JUPITER
BY RAYMOND Z. GALLUN

Plump, genial suburbanite Anson Nord becomes a space-spanning hero when Earth threatens to totter under the weight of its own perfections! 9

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EVER SINCE those long-ago days when Jules Verne was dreaming up lunar projectiles, long-range submarines and super-Big Berthas, devotees of scientific or pseudo-scientific fantasy have been busily pointing out the importance of their favorite fiction medium through its elements of prophecy.

With the arrival of each new invention —from, say, the two-way-stretch girdle to the atomic bomb—an entire new gaggle of red-hot arguments is born in stf circles. One group will insist that Mortimer Q. Lambchop, Ph. D., first predicted the two-way-stretch or the A-bomb or, perhaps, the use of raw plankton for human alimentary needs, in a long-buried tale written for AIR-WONDER STORIES back in 1929. Another group will point defiantly to the effect that it was first predicted in one of the Tom Swift "novels." And so on, far into the proverbial night.

In short, prophecy in science fiction lies at the other end of the scale from the BEM. And those who secretly dote on Bug-Eyed Monsters (alas, in some circumstances, ourselves included) seek to conceal their shame beneath high-flown verbiage anent science fiction's predictions of gadgets to come.

What "Prophecy" Means

It seems to us unfortunate that, to an apparent majority of stfanatics, prophecy means no less and no more than the foretelling of such gadgets, which are devoted solely to the increased comfort or the increased destruction of *homo sapiens*. For the entire and appalling range of all such gadgetry, monumental as it has become in our generation, affects only indirectly the true progress of Man, if any, and is therefore of importance even when correctly foretold.

With the development of the industrial era and the snowballing progress of applied science that has made it possible, it becomes increasingly less difficult to predict forthcoming popular devices. Each of us meets petty mechanical annoyances in the routine of daily living. We may dislike clothes hangers, humidity, winter clothing, tipping waiters, radio and television static. Such dislikes vary according to our personalities, our frustrations, our environments.

While each of us is as different in toto from his neighbors as are the variations in our individual fingerprints, yet as in fingerprints each of our personal quirks is shared by millions. Is is therefore safe to say that any item which bothers us must also bother a vast segment of the population. And if something mechanical irks a large number of folks, it is safe to predict that someone someday will do something about by-passing or removing that annoyance. Such prophecy—if prophecy it be—can hardly miss.

To call a prediction of this nature prophecy at all in the true sense of the word and of the thought behind the word is like comparing a singing commercial to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Moreover, such gadgetorial necromancy represents an even crasser and more trivial alloy of the true ore of science.

The Opposition Rises

At this point the opposition rises to state, in effect, that each such device represents another step toward Man's control of his environment, certainly a pioneer development in evolution as we know it on this Earth. Perhaps it does. Yet of what use is such mastery of our planet, of our Solar System, perhaps in time even of our galaxy, unless Man has learned to control himself, to adapt himself instantaneously to the changes he is beginning to make in the universe around him? The current un-

(Continued on page 144)

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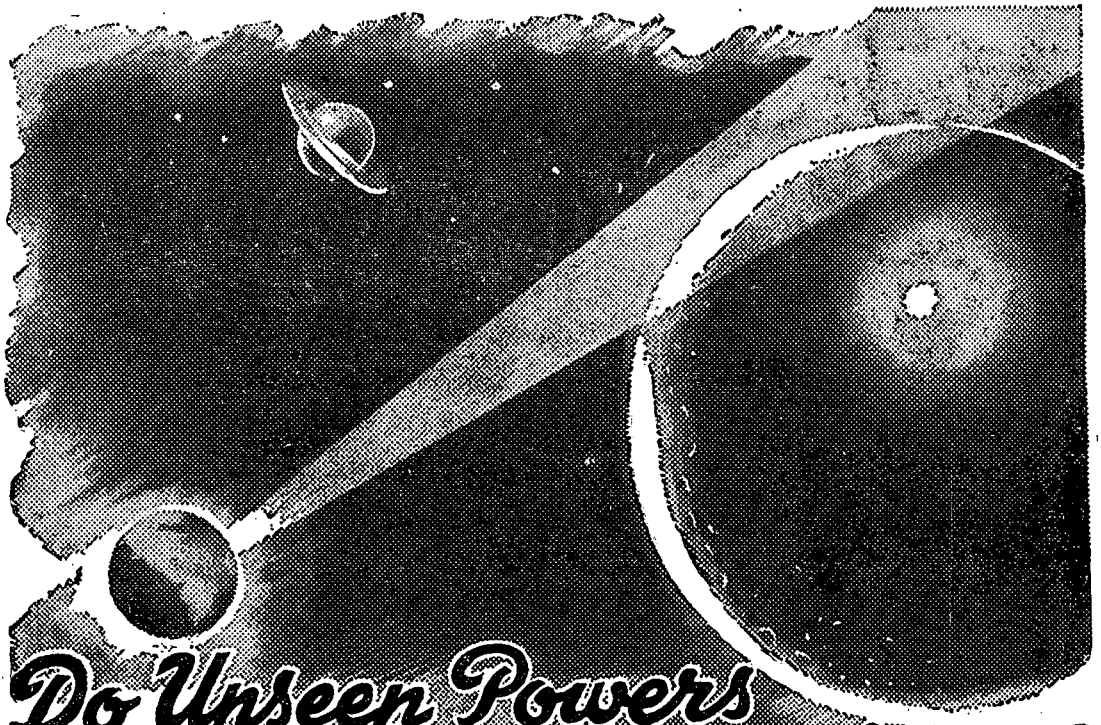

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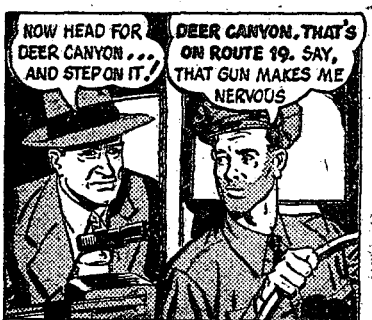
IT LOOKED LIKE TROUBLE UNTIL . . .

HIS TAXI NEWLY EQUIPPED WITH TWO-WAY RADIO, JOE DOUGLAS IS REPORTING TO HIS GARAGE AT THE END OF A LONG DAY BEHIND THE WHEEL WHEN HIS REAR VISION MIRROR SHOWS . . .



LEAVING THE OPEN RADIO MIKE ON HIS LAP, JOE REPEATS THE UNSUSPECTING THUG'S INSTRUCTIONS . . .

. . . TO HIS GARAGE, WHERE THE SUPERINTENDENT RELAYS THEM TO THE POLICE

MOTHER'S QUITE UPSET. CAN'T YOU GET OUR STATEMENTS LATER?
I'LL TAKE THEM HOME AND COME DOWN TO HEADQUARTERS
CERTAINLY, MISS BARLOW

TWO HOURS LATER
YOU'RE FAMOUS, JOE! AND SAY, MR. BARLOW WOULD LIKE TO SEE YOU AT HIS HOME
GOSH, I DIDN'T SHAVE TODAY. CAN YOU LEND ME A RAZOR?

I GET MY DEGREE FROM NIGHT LAW SCHOOL NEXT MONTH
H-M-M-M, MY FIRM HAS STARTED MANY A YOUNG LAWYER UP THE LADDER . . .
I DIDN'T REALIZE HE'S SO HANDSOME

FOR SLICK, REFRESHING SHAVES AT A SAVING, GET THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE THE KEENEST AND LONGEST LASTING OF ALL LOW-PRICED BLADES AND FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR PRECISELY. AVOID THE IRRITATING EFFECT OF MISFIT BLADES. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES IN THE CONVENIENT, NEW 10-BLADE PACKAGE WITH USED-BLADE COMPARTMENT.
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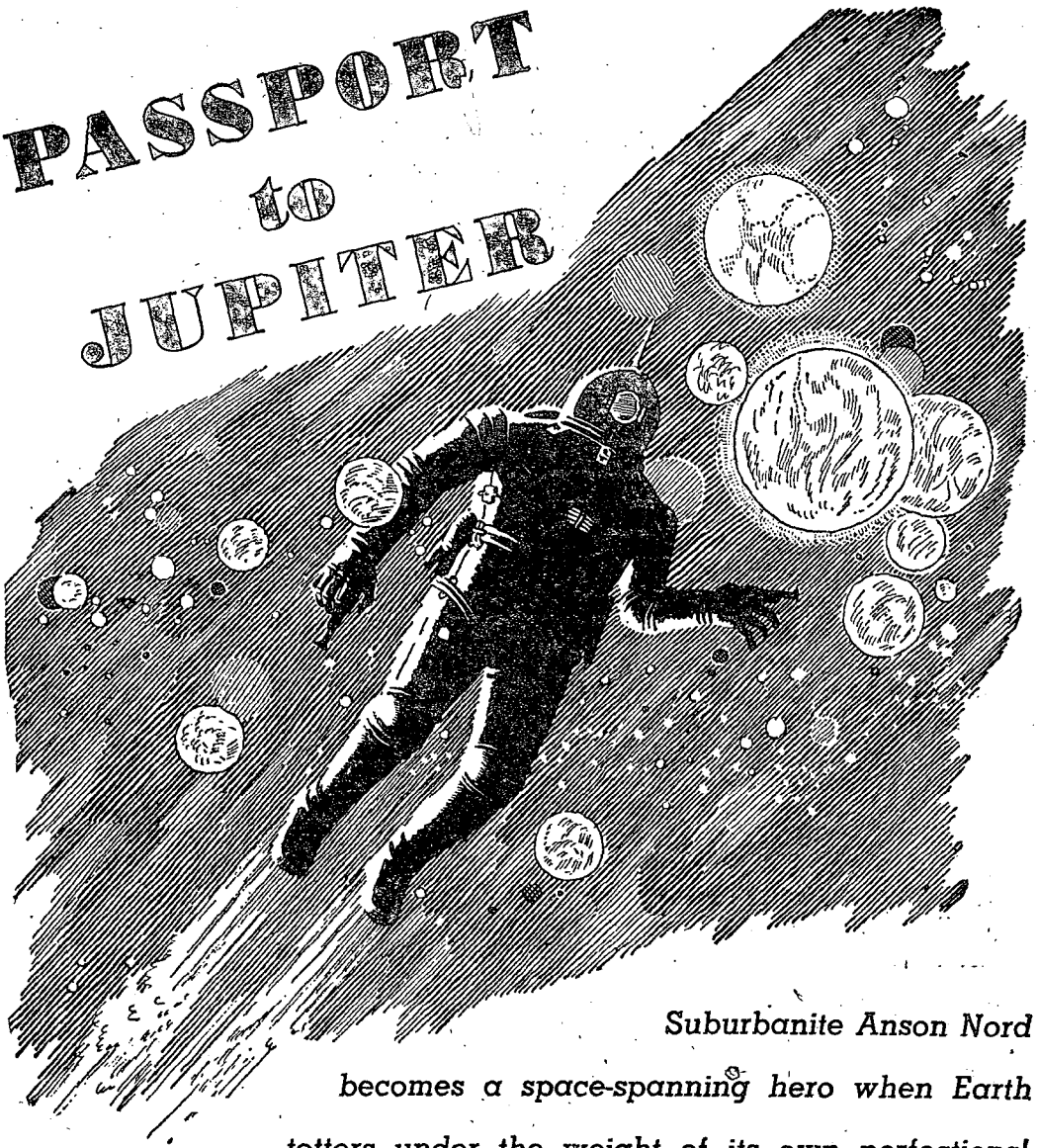
PASSPORT to JUPITER



Suburbanite Anson Nord becomes a space-spanning hero when Earth totters under the weight of its own perfections!

A NOVEL BY RAYMOND Z. GALLUN

CHAPTER I

The Sensipsych

THE scene was suburban—lush with trees and flowers from beyond which small villas peeped. Anson Nord, plump and genial, leaned on his front fence and watched the little robot lawnmower come purring out of the driveway across the street and go clattering down the pavement, where there was no grass to cut at all.

Anson Nord watched and grinned. The lawnmower was like an ear-

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nest pupdog that had got lost. That it was now failing to do its job was not its fault but was the result of its owner's neglect.

"Rome of the decadence," he thought. "Or are we worse—with all the gadgets we've got that they never heard of?"

As usual the thought seemed to flow into a dark and poisonous pool, somehow—not quite tangibly—menacing. But always his guilt was overpowered by the presence of sensuous peace. There was too much to fight against. If there was a thing to fight *for* it seemed nebulous and futile. One's will to think ended in a shrug. What remained was a sense of futility, a puzzled, jaded feeling.

Mankind had long ago learned to control the weather completely. That was a trifling accomplishment. For mankind now owned three other worlds. Sleek trans-space liners reached out to Mercury, Venus and Mars, bringing their passengers to crystal-domed cities in which, though the conditions on those planets was utterly strange, there was now no loss of comfort.

Even all this was trifling since, for more than a hundred years, no one had died of old age. The Vita processes dissolved the mineral accumulations of the years out of the human body, firmed the flesh, smoothed the skin, replaced the germs of teeth and hair in shrunken jaws and withered skulls. So that one who had been more than a century old was, in body, nineteen again.

More lately had come another triumph, scarcely less wonderful than the Vita processes. It proposed no threat of overpopulation which, in conjunction with the present low birthrate, alien-planet colonies could solve for at least a century. But to the soul of man it was more dangerous.

Like the dream of eternal youth its idea was not new. It had been written about, scoffed at and hoped for, through centuries. In a small way it had had its counterpart in movie, radio and television eras. Realized, it produced a fad.

Sensation, artifically stimulated in the sensory centers of the brain, was the base of the invention. That meant that any experience was possible—all on a dream-scale and duplicating reality perfectly—but without the physical dangers involved in actual adventures. This seemed an advantage—for with potential immortality on a mortal plane life had become dearer. Few cared

Reality and the Utopian Concept

IT is a curious fact that the closer man comes to mastering his environment and satisfying all his needs, the more deeply he distrusts the Utopian concept. Not long before the smoke-belching dawn of the so-called Industrial Era, such undoubted deep thinkers as Sir Francis Bacon, Sir Thomas More and even Dean Jonathan Swift felt no such squalid doubts.

Their heavens-on-Earth were simply conceived within the limitations of the monarchic principle—a principle which tends toward comfortable oversimplification at best. No one doubted for a moment but that life for every citizen, in such a well-ordered civilization as Bacon, More or Swift conceived, would be a long lark of happy usefulness.

However, as society has expanded and become infinitely more complex under the impetus first of steam power, then of oil and electricity and now of the dismembered atom, Utopia has moved mirage-like, ever further from us. Psychiatry as well as recent history has done much to suggest that it might well be a nightmare after the dreams of Michael Arlen and Aldous Huxley.

Mr. Gallun, in his novel, feels that the path of reality lies somewhere on the uneven ground between the idealists and the cynics. And we have a hunch—or perhaps a hope—that his path is the path of truth.

—THE EDITOR

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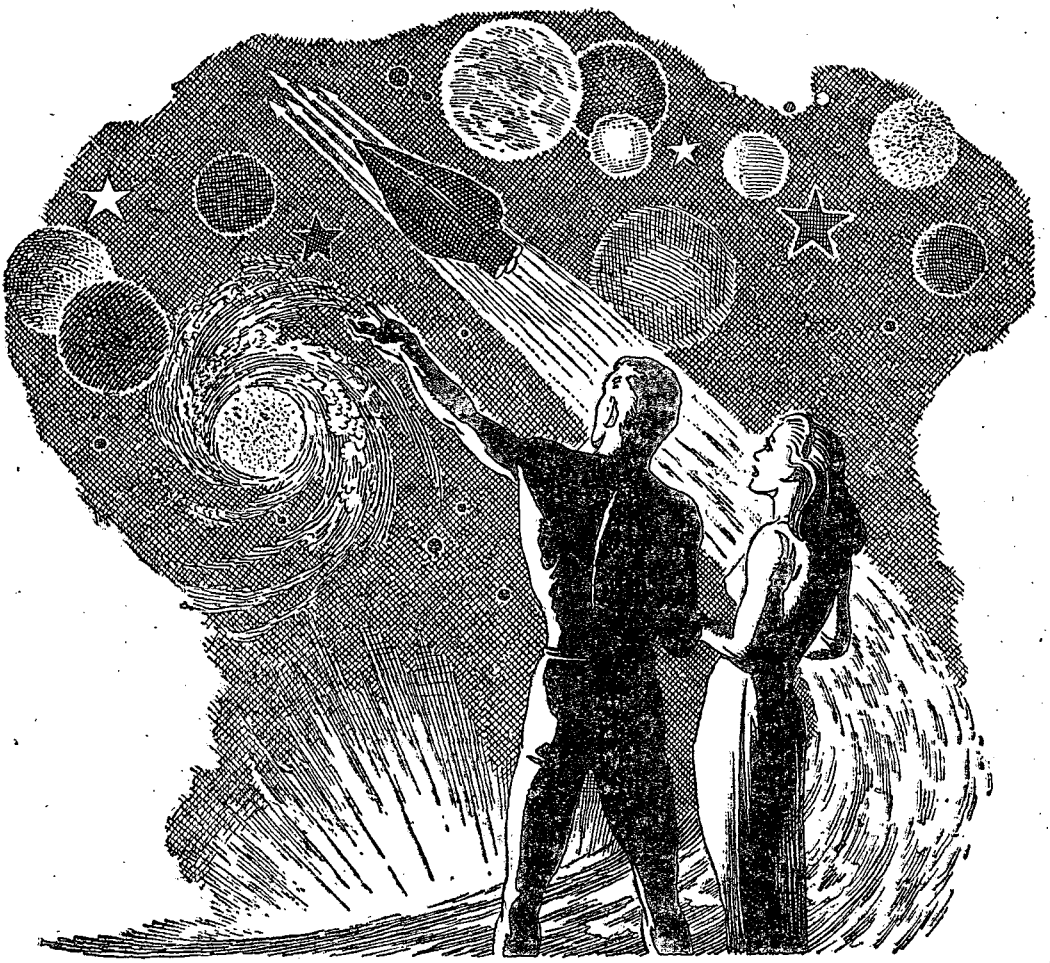

Said Joey, "Who says the stars are too many light-years away to reach?"

to risk it to the still-deadly possibilities of violence.

Briefly Anson Nord considered these points while he watched the lawnmower robot of a shiftless acquaintance go clattering blithely down the road.

AS it reached the bend where magnificent elm trees arched, Nord went out of his gate and, impelled by the motives of a good neighbor, broke into an awkward lope.

Panting, he caught up and, still running beside the robot, bent down and shut off its atomic motor. "Hey, fella," he chuckled, as if it could understand him, "Where are you goin'? *Mama mia!*"

He squatted down to adjust the machine's simple electronic brain, which had gone awry. Anson Nord's job was to supervise for an hour a day the work of repair-robots. But now, tinkering with his own bare hands, he found a fragment of a lost satisfaction.

Neighborhood life, loyalty and curiosity are all as ageless as the back-fence chat. Soon Nord had a group of neighbors around him. They'd seen the lawnmower running away, too.

"Waverly's mower, hunh?" Dave Clinton drawled. He was another big easy-going man. "It's a wonder Waverly wouldn't take enough time out from that new XD-9 set he's got, to check over the machinery..."

For a second some puzzled anger and scare tightened Clinton's jaw, then his eyes lighted in resignation. "Ho-ho—

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wait till I get mine though," he went on. "Waverly'll be a dabbler by comparison. My wife and I will hook ourselves to the vein-feeder and you won't see us at all. We'll hibernate like dreaming bears."

Mrs. Kovis, who was a great hand at keeping up with the Joneses and who had entertained ambitions of becoming an opera star, shrilled egotistically, "We're getting an XD-10 set—improved. Of course everybody can't get one—yet. But my John has influence. We'll *live* in music."

John Kovis, her husband, a little mild guy, winced. Nord could guess why. Mrs. Kovis was of that certain kind. She liked Marilee Adams programs. In the sensipsych dreams, she *was* Marilee. She sang or rather shrieked to glittering throngs that applauded and bravoed cornily. Nobles, rigged out like circus impresarios, bowed to kiss her hand and brought her jewels and stupendous bouquets.

Mrs. Kovis, made very pretty by plastic surgery, was a small-time female egomaniac. It was rumored that, years ago, she had had her vocal chords strengthened and adjusted until they surpassed those of the long-dead Caruso. But the small pathetic brain that controlled them still knew nothing of music. So they merely rasped and shrieked.

Ellwynn Carpenter, a youth of nineteen with a weak chin, fanatical eyes and a certain clarity of vision, chimed in: "Listen to her! George Schaeffer and the other scientists who invented the sensipsych ought to be strung up! They're turning the whole world and the colonized planets into an opium den! Good night! Couldn't our Mrs. Kovis, here, learn to cook or something—to use up her excess energies—if she can't sing? Her robot-kitchen wouldn't care!"

Young Carpenter paused for a second, under the startled stares of his neighbors. Then he drew a ragged breath and went on very slowly, "Otherwise, maybe a certain class of thinking that is becoming common is also correct—that the only way to save our race from complete rot is to bring violence back into the world.

"Arson, rapine, murder, warfare—let the spineless die in the outbreak. Scare those with latent courage into developing it while they defend themselves and face primitive danger. Let there be a return to hard and satisfying reality. Let..."

Ellwynn Carpenter stopped orating. A child of decadence himself he was not overly courageous. He looked all at once surprised and scared by what he had said—as if his own words had frightened him.

THE silence was electric. Mrs. Kovis' face went white, whether more with fear at a pendant threat than with fury at insult it was hard to say. She might have gone into a tirade against the youth for his remarks about her had she known what defense to build herself. As it was a prissy, pompous and largely phony expression of self-righteousness came over her face and hung there, stymied by the fragment of a hurt look.

Her husband, now full of will to fight in her defense but lacking both the skill and force, bristled like a bantam rooster without spurs. "Listen here, young man!" he snapped. "I'll not have such things said of my wife!"

Dave Clinton's manner had ceased to be benign and became quietly grim. "It's the rest of what Ellwynn said that bothers me, folks," he remarked. "Maybe you'd better enlarge on the subject, Ellwynn." His tone carried soft menace. Anson Nord stood up. "Easy, everybody," he chuckled. A couple of other men, also sensing how near the surface savagery had risen, moved to his side, ready if it was necessary to enforce peace.

Again there was stillness all around. It hit Nord in a certain oppressive way, even with the bird-songs and sunshine in it. He felt as though he were standing in a city that was already falling into ruin, signaling the end of the pride of man. There was a graveyard mood over all.

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But there were other facets to the feeling. What Ellwynn Carpenter had said in faver of violence was not as alien to Nord's own blood as he might have wished. And he knew that the same dark thoughts must have stirred secretly in other minds around him.

The cause was contempt for one's self and one's fellows—disgust. When your brain idled, this fire-shot remedy was bound to occur to you. It had a certain logic about it. You almost *liked* the idea though it was madness—though you feared it more than you admired it.

Especially when you remembered that the *potentials* for violence had expanded enormously through the years and in inverse proportion to coddled mankind's weakened endurance. In the sciences of subatomics and bacteriology, for example.

The very forces that had made peace and plenty and emasculation possible, did far more for the potentials of destruction. There was here a widened unbalance that could make your hide pucker with dread until it seemed no longer to fit. Slow grass-grown decay was one thing. But here was the shadow of something else.

"It *could* happen," Dave Clinton growled. "Just like Ellwynn says but worse. A bunch of nuts, preparing hell-stuff secretly, could strike at any time. We've all heard rumors."

Nord smiled. To him, *could* was not the right word. *Will* was much better. That humanity faced inevitable outbreaks soon to happen was supported by rumor, by Ellwynn Carpenter's outburst of a moment ago, most of all by his own parallel ruminations. Nord was sure that he, himself, was a peaceful soul. So if the remedy of fury for the ills of the world could occur to him, how much more fiercely must it occur to others? People who seemed average but hid fanaticism and a martyr-strain in their hearts? Yes, it almost *had* to be. People thought in parallels.

Anson Nord looked at the now-worried faces around him. He knew that his neighbors were mostly good people fundamentally. He knew that his thoughts and theirs were much the same and that, like himself, they were groping for some other solution—which was hard to find. They were trapped by a very imperfect kind of perfection, like animals in a pit. And they were frightened by their helplessness.

"Maybe I should suggest the obvious again," Nord kidded. "That every sensipsych set be destroyed—and the factories—and broadcast centers."

Melton Harms, who had close-set eyes, smirked cynically. "I seem to have heard that some men have been trying to get concerted action along those lines for quite a while, Nord," he said. "People have always had trouble getting together on anything. And they never have been much good at giving things up—even if they thought it was best."

"Maybe wiping out the sensipsych isn't the best thing to do anyhow," Nord commented. "The other day I picked up a circular, put out by a group which, for lack of a name that would sound less prissy and uplifting among us sophisticates, calls itself *Common Sense*. The circular pointed out that the sensipsych is very useful in therapy and as a training and study device, besides being of wholesome value for entertainment if used in moderation.

"And—I quote—'No effort to stamp out any part of progress—even in the supposed interests of better progress, has ever had any true justification. Rather, our *outlook* must progress to match t e c h n i c a l advancement . . .' *Common Sense* proposed no actual solution to present-day excesses and troubles but appealed to earnest *thought* as a sure means of finding one. Yeah."

"Yeah," Harms echoed dryly.

AT least Nord had not lost his sense of humor. Maybe he did wrong but he used it now to lighten tension among his neighbors, to mask what he believed was pending.

"There used to be disease, poverty and injustice to fight against," he

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chuckled. "But now all that is gone and we're stuck with a Nirvana whose perhaps unsolvable defect is that it's so fine there's just no farther to go.

"But we're still human. We've still got energies. It's our way to be fighting something or doing something. So maybe we all ought to get shovels and wheelbarrows. We can start piling dirt up into a big hill. When it's two hundred meters high, we'll all stand back and admire it and feel proud of ourselves—seeing what a nice, pretty hill we've made."

"That was well put, Nord," Melton Harms growled cynically. "Even colonizing the planets of the stars and galaxies wouldn't amount to any more, as far as we're concerned, than a bigger pile of dirt that we'd heaped up for no reason. There's nothing out there that we really need. So, I'm ready to stop worrying.

"Why fight a natural situation? Go to Florida, like my old lady hints? That's screwy when I can get Florida out of my old XD-8 without the inconvenience. Who cares about the so-called 'real present' or what happens to the human race? The Earth could get along without us crawling on it. So why not be ourselves? Me—I've got some good contraband dream-recordings. Come over some time, Nord, and we'll go through 'em together."

Anson Nord didn't need Harms' wink

Anson Nord and Marge lay down on the twin cots of the sensipsych to dream

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to know what was meant. Anything was possible via sensipsych. And that included sultanic debaucheries. But the tautness deep inside him still gnawed at his nerves.

Being a man of an old civilization Nord was tolerant, gentle and in a way wise. It was hard to make him angry. His attitude, generally, was a mild shrug. So his anger now at himself,

Harms and his neighbors was a passive bitterness.

He knew that he was a long way from being anything like Bob Harwell of the Harwell Family, that reckless, space-wandering group of three, whose adventures were recorded and then sent back to Earth for sensipsych broadcast. Millions of fans then experienced them. Nord was one.

"Yeah, folks," Nord joshed. "Maybe [illegible] private answer to decadence is to [illegible]plodding across the blazing deserts [illegible]Mercury with the Harwells—and in [illegible] flesh. Hunh?"

Harms' laugh was harsh. "Um—sure," he commented. "And I could dig up a horse and an antique cowboy suit and be like One-Shot Dixon, whose escapades sometimes send me."

Nord very much doubted that he had the guts to do what the Harwells did, though he liked and admired them immensely. He wondered if that made him juvenile or if the Harwells weren't just a little crazy—risking immortality to a dangerous career.

Nord crouched again to finish adjusting the control of the lawnmower. Meanwhile he became aware of the backsliding of his neighbors. Slowly they yielded to their rut. The menace did not end but their fear began to fade. Perhaps they grew weary of it, like children. Or perhaps, being unable to solve a grimness in life, they sought escape from it.

"What's your favorite program, Davis?" somebody asked somebody else.

"Me? I do like the Harwells. And the Past Made Alive series. In the latest episode I was Imhotep, the physician and engineer-scientist who built the first Egyptian pyramid. Next I'll

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be a seafaring trader from ancient Crete. And say—they've revived Tarzan! The actor, Charlie Roberts, plays the part."

Ellywnn Carpenter walked away, grumbling. Maybe he had some right ideas. But he was dangerous white-livered froth. Even if Mrs. Kovis hated herself now, she could find relief from her hatred in operatic fantasy.

Melton Harms made a mocking salute with one hand as he departed, perhaps to enjoy his contraband recordings. Dave Clinton shrugged rather bitterly, and mumbled, "So long."

CHAPTER II

The Dream

LEFT alone, Nord finished adjusting the mower and watched it roll dutifully back to the unkempt but beautiful premises, where its master and mistress lay under a rich spell, far from dull fact.

Nord felt like a deserted dissenter among Lotus-eaters. What was the use? So he returned to his pleasant villa, gay with flowers and luxurious with concealed servant-devices.

He found Margaret, his wife, trying to read an old book. The handicap was obvious. Books were so dry and you had to follow their continuity with imagination—which was so dim.

Margaret was beautiful—as all women were beautiful now. If they were not born so they could be changed—easily and without pain. She was also intelligent and kind. To Nord she seemed like the one thing truly worth while in his existence.

As he entered the living room she dropped her book. Her large dark eyes fixed themselves on his in a clear hope for something new in a succession of hollow days.

"I watched from the window, An," she said. "Did anybody say anything different?"

"Same old talk, more or less," Nord answered, unsure of whether he was being evasive or not.

"Even the newscast has gone off the air," Margaret said. "I guess it just got bored too—poor thing."

It had been too far back in history since the newscast blackout had last been used to mask disaster and prevent the spread of hysteria, for Nord to recognize a grim significance in this. In fact he had hardly listened to what Margaret said.

Now she looked at him gently as if searching for a grain of nearness to him. "We're idiots to think too much, An," she told him. "What we ought to have is a new XD-10 set. All sensible people will have one soon."

"You too, Marge?" He laughed. "Women are conformists. What most people do *has* to be right."

"If you act alone you're left out in the cold, An," she replied. "We have a three-day weekend ahead—because of world State Day. Shall we dream right through it? I'll even join you on a Harwell adventure if we can cut in on a good dance-dream routine now and then.

Marge loved dancing. And in the dreams, since the feeling of rhythm and motion was recorded from the minds of experts, her dancing was flawless. And one's muscles didn't tire. Marge could go on like that for days. Her resistance to the boredom of it was childlike.

Nord felt the appeal of the sensipsych—the bright escape. But he felt the self-disgust. And he remained more than ever aware of the dark revolt in certain minds. A deadly smoldering, yet a therapy with which part of himself agreed. He even wondered for a moment if it were safe to be off-guard in sleep.

He wanted to resist. Yet what else could he do but give up—like his neighbors? It seemed that a dark tide pushed everyone along. He could water his flowers, but an automatic device could do it better than he. Perhaps he could coax his wife to fly to California—which they had done before.

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"Okay, Marge," he said.

Their old XD-8 was a beautiful piece of furniture. Two soft couches folded down from it. Nord and his wife lowered themselves to reclining positions and put on the shiny headbands. They jabbed hollow needles into their arms. The attached tubes and apparatus could provide intravenous feeding and even purification and reoxygenation of the blood for any desired length of time. The sleep was like hibernation. The body worked at a lowered metabolism rate.

Anson Nord set the selector and moved a switch. Marge touched his hand companionably as realities blurred around them. Then, by recording, Bob Harwell's voice spoke, rich and confident. It thrilled Nord as a hero's voice must thrill a henchman of lesser strength.

"Folks," Harwell said theatrically, "before we continue with our interlude on Mercury let me talk of the next Harwell adventure—deep in the poisonous atmosphere of giant Jupiter, where no man has yet entered. So far I haven't experienced it myself. But I am sure that it will be the greatest of all our adventures. Certain hints have come out of the ruins on frozen Ganymede and Callisto, the Jovian satellites. So our trip to Jupiter is really a quest for incredible wonders.

"Now before we go on with our Mercurian adventure let me remind you that Ajax Robot Devices are the best made, the most dependable for your comfort and safety. *Remember* Ajax. *Buy* Ajax. Ajax sensipsych sets are unequalled for vividness. You are safe with Ajax. No matter how thrilling your experiences remember that there is no danger at all . . ."

THE commercial ended—with the inevitable reassurance to John Public, who, even in his craving for excitement, still must always be wrapped in cotton-wool.

And now the Nords seemed to be on Mercury, in the twilight belt between the eternally dark and frigid hemisphere and the blazing hot half of the planet, where the rays of the near sun were strong enough to melt lead.

Anson Nord *was* Bob Harwell, reckless and skillful. Margaret was Clara, Bob Harwell's wife. This happened by a mental selectivity of a triply viewpointed recording, each mind automatically choosing the viewpoint that suited it best.

But the faces that Margaret and Anson Nord saw of each other, behind the view-windows of the helmets of the space suits they were wearing, were still each other's faces. This was accomplished by means of a kind of psychic resonance from their own brains.

But since they had no son of their own the twelve-year-old boy near them remained Joey Harwell—tow-headed, freckled, cynical as kids often are, but equally eager and resourceful.

Off to the left was the eternal glorious sunset, which would brighten or darken somewhat during the course of the Mercurian year of eighty-eight terrestrial days, because of the librating wobble of this small fantastic world in its eccentric orbit. Dust, blown high in the thin atmosphere, made that sunset so gorgeous.

Off to the right were the light-gilded peaks of the ice mountains. Ahead lay the mossy plain of the Twilight Belt, stretching between two terrible deserts of furnace heat and spatial cold. The plain was dotted with boulders and weird vegetation that looked half like cactus, half like living crystals. Behind, under its great transparent airdome, lay Mercury City, colonial metropolis of the Earthly colonists.

Nord heard Joey Harwell say through their oxygen-helmet radios "Hurry up Pop. We've got to reach Korolow, capital of the extinct Lubas, in an hour to be on schedule. We can have a rest there and then start climbing the mountains toward the Dark Side Station."

Nord chuckled over the reply that Bob Harwell had spoken when this episode was real—"What's the rush, Joe?"

Were an XD-9 or-10 set being used Margaret's face would not have shown

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that faint elusive flicker. Otherwise verisimilitude was perfect. There was only the vague dissatisfaction of knowing that it was a fake.

The charm that the Harwells held for Anson Nord ran deeper than his vicarious love of space-wandering. Perhaps he admired them for being a modern family that lived modern realities on a real plane.

Nord recaptured from strange adventure a little of his usual pleasure and relief from unrest. Nevertheless his mind still toiled apart. He wished he had a son—a lovable urchin with the courage of a mature man, like Joe. Marge and he had never got around to having it happen. For gestation in a nourishing fluid was frequent these days—outside of the human body.

The smokes of trouble gathered more thickly in Nord's brain. Overhead in the deep blue sky the hovering sunset burnished the flanks of a spaceship. And from its prow flickers of blue-white fire jetted, checking its speed for a landing.

That fire reminded Nord that over two centuries ago the A-bomb had been invented. It had been a crude thing, yet in an instant it had converted into hell teeming cities, where people labored, and endured the troubles of life and war, but still had their friendships and pleasures. A hell in which even the minds of those days, far more inured to hardship than those of the present, tottered into hysteria.

Nord considered too that the pattern of life on Earth and the colonized planets had grown fearfully complex. The greatest unknown of these restless times was perhaps Dr. George Schaeffer, chief inventor of the sensipsych.

JUDGED by his photographs—his angular face, soft yet fierce eyes, his scraggly hair—he was as gentle as a Messiah and as driven as a demon. Maybe he meant to be a despot, benign or otherwise. Maybe, for all his genius, he was an impractical fool who meant to coddle mankind as an overindulgent father coddles his children. But maybe even that, in some intricate way, became less than foolish. For from genius one should expect the unexpected—startling trains of thought apart from the accepted views.

By repute Schaeffer had no time to indulge in sensipsych visions himself. He labored in his laboratory to disfruit the secrets of nature—while in a world of common and galling leisure he wished for more energy, more time for himself.

Margaret, plodding beside Nord in the weird moss, was in borrowed raptures over the unchanging sunset. "Who could imagine anything like it?" she was saying now. But it wasn't Marge's way to be so enthusiastic of her own accord.

Following the continuity of the record Nord felt his gloved hand go out to pat a small armored shoulder. He envied Joey Harwell at that moment—and pitied him. He should be playing marbles and baseball in school—not running around the solar system, risking his young life and a potential eternity of rejuvenation while others, some of whom were two centuries older, lived in luxury and safety. Or was this a wrong view?

Shame nibbled at Nord again. He remembered that even here in the Mercurian dome-cities, on what was naturally supposed to be a rough frontier, many were already addicts of the sensipsych. But Nord knew that it was just a detail of a scientific advancement that made man almost purposeless and useless, perhaps even obsolete.

He thought of Ellwynn Carpenter again, wondering if, for all his weakness, he did belong to the secret cure-by-violence group. It was not strange that one truth escaped Nord entirely. For he did not see a small oppressed man sneak away to a hidden gathering place. It was John Kovis.

Nord's mind worked on through miles of dream-hiking and through several rest-periods in dream-camps. While in the latter places the scene shifted entirely for awhile. His wife and he would be dancing to soft music in a setting that Marge l o v e d—some glittering glamour-spot, much nearer home.

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Nord climbed with Joey and Marge into the ice-mountains. They skirted fearsome chasms. And they reached the Dark Side Station. There they began to enjoy the perfect pantomime of dinner. In its delights Nord at last checked his troubled thinking.

But his comfort began to be disturbed. Gradually he became aware of a tightness in his chest that could not belong to the vision. It turned painful. Moreover, the pictures projected into his brain were taking on a reddish tint. And they were growing dim.

Panic gripped Anson Nord. . . .

CHAPTER III

Walk Before Breakfast

THERE was much that had gone before to loose chaos on the world —centuries of scientific progress actually. But a step backward only to the early morning of the same day, when Nord stopped a runaway lawnmower, could be enough to make the chain of events clear.

In the center of the City a hundred miles away Bob Harwell was out walking before breakfast. *The* Bob Harwell —popular dream-hero.

He was alone with his two bodyguards—as alone as Ajax, the great company he worked for, ever allowed *him* to be while on Earth. And he was troubled. Maybe that was what his walk was for—to help him try again to figure things out.

He knew that millions of fans loved him. But since he understood how hero-worship builds illusions from afar he took it matter-of-factly. He was not especially vain or modest. There was nothing very unusual about him except for his atavistic and perhaps foolhardy habit of living a reckless life on a first-hand basis. He was just a slender medium-sized man with short black hair and quick movements and a way of getting things done efficiently.

He knew that to be admired by a great number of people means that one must also be hated by some. But he was further aware that his present circumstances could not be fully described by anything so simple.

So he did not walk as one is apt to walk on a peaceful street in early morning—with absent-minded assurance of safety. Rather his air was more like that of a soldier of some bygone war, out on patrol. Part of his brain and body were on the alert. It did not matter that the sun was bright, that the street was beautiful and all but deserted or that as yet there had been no visible trouble.

Meanwhile in the privacy of his own head he kept figuring—"Any time now, Harwell. Everybody hates his own guts at least a little. Some are bound to despise the weaker ones more. The emotional pressure is building up toward the exploding point. Can't blame them. Rebuild civilization, they think. But they'll hate people like you most, Harwell.

"How long has your conscience been bothering you? You like your job but you're partly to blame for the way things are—not on the passive flaccid side but on the *active* side. You *make* sensipsych dreams. You're *guilty*, Harwell. You ought to be doing something to right matters. The question is, what? That makes sense, that is . . ."

To the fact that part of his mind had remained wary while he pondered Harwell now owed his life. To that and lucky chance and perhaps to the nervousness of the hand of an assassin who, in this decadent era, was not quite equal to his task. And to the one defect of a very modern weapon which some whimsical soul had named the Midas Touch.

Harwell saw the glint of sunlight on the pistol-like arm as a slim young man aimed it from across the street. There was no immediate sound with the discharge of the weapon but the path of hurtling neutrons was marked by a ribbon of glowing air.

Harwell pushed his two burly guards back toward the first doorway along the

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street. The three moved smoothly and without a word, taking shelter. This was the important thing to do—ahead of drawing to return the fire.

Then all of the scene was for an instant illuminated by dazzling blue light that made the brilliant sunshine look dim. Just for a second, as usual, there had been a delay or "hang" between the impinging of the weapon's neutron stream on the matter it struck and the explosion.

It had been a saving factor for the three men, giving them time to take cover. The roar was terrific. And the stones of the building front, which had been hit instead of Harwell himself, came clattering down.

Before the first echoes of this minor atomic blast had died the would-be murderer vanished around a corner. Perhaps rattled by fear of his own deed or by his exposure to retribution of the same kind he had not chanced a second shot.

Harwell's bodyguards had drawn their own weapons and they stood poised like baffled bulldogs, wondering whether to give chase.

But Harwell said, "Nix, fellas. He's out of sight. Following would just give him another chance to snipe at us. And he probably doesn't count, anyway."

They didn't have to risk the dangers of poisonous radiation and examine the ruins of the crumbled building-front to know how the Midas Touch worked. They knew. Their own armament was of the same class. The neutron stream, as narrow as the calibre of an old-time forty-five, had hit the building—and there, after a second, the atoms of the stone had collapsed inward on themselves to form denser elements.

Were it not for the energy released by such collapse a small, circular hole would have been drilled right through the structure. But the fifty-thousand-degree heat and the explosion that went with it, tore the hole, and the surrounding stone, apart.

Some of the latter dripped like fused glass. And from the substance that had filled the hole itself an incandescent mist was formed. It cooled quickly and like a faint frost settled in crystalline form.

BUT it was no longer stone. Transmutation had taken place. The tiny crystals were of lead, osmium and gold. But this fact was just an incidental part of the weapon's functioning—like the smoke of an ancient musket. It had no importance.

"This is it," one of Harwell's companions growled.

Harwell didn't doubt very much that this attack on himself meant that the chips were down for action. It was as if he'd read the future long ago by the feeling within himself. The disgust of certain minds at being coddled—the loss of pride—the slow decay—the urge to tear away from one's own weakness—and the growing conviction that something *must* be done.

Among a minority, anyway—they would gather secretly, organize, plan, increase their hidden numbers—work like any underground movement—use the same technique known to rodents for eons to avoid the vastly greater power of the robot police—concealment and elusiveness.

Harwell knew that in an effort to stamp out the dreams part of their plan would be to strike at the whole sensi-psych industry and those connected with it—himself included. He'd heard the stories of little groups of men rounded up quietly from cellars and other places—men who didn't know who gave them their orders—who knew only a code name that could reveal nothing of a leader's identity—who knew nothing of the location or membership lists of other groups.

No, Bob Harwell scarcely needed to notice the five police aircraft suddenly zooming in circles over the city or the long grey car that swept past in the street to know that trouble more general than an attempted assassination of himself had caused all this excitement on the part of the forces of law order. This was the beginning of the rumored reign of terror.

At first Harwell was almost relieved

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—even glad. The unrest in the world wasn't quite so much a brooding unseen thing, any more. The strain of long-term waiting and wondering when trouble would start was at an end. Some savage fragment of him even approved of the cure-by-violence theory—if it ever could be a cure and if there were no other way.

But the brassy taste of fear was not slow in coming to his tongue. He had faced danger often on a daredevil basis, yet he was not one of those who denied that fear existed—for him. And it was with him now.

For he grasped the fact that the stream of neutrons that had jetted at him was only the tiniest beginning of what was to happen—a second from now, an hour, a day, a week. He never would know when. But a small hidden shop, fitted with transmutation equipment, might in this age brew sufficient hell to destroy a planet.

"We'd better be getting back," Harwell said to his bodyguards.

They began threading their way through the small scared crowd that was gathering before the building the Midas Touch had shattered. Several hundred yards ahead, set in a lush park, was the huge Ajax Tower. The scene of which it was part was like a cut-out from Paradise—as peaceful and beautiful as these times were supposed to be.

But out of this magnificent scenery a small Earthy form in dungarees ran. Harwell guessed at once that his son must have been on his way to him when the explosion had happened and had seen it. When the kid stopped beside him, the evidence of this was plain. He was panting and sweating and even his freckles looked pale.

"You all right?" Joey clucked.

"Sure, Joe," Harwell answered.

He was proud that the kid neither needed nor bothered to ask any more questions about the attempt on his life or what it meant. Joey understood things. You didn't have to shield him with reassurances. Harwell felt very near to his boy. Joe was hard and ready even when he was scared. Maybe hair-trigger living had taught him to be a little too grim for a youngster. Maybe that was another kind of tragedy.

Now the kid's pale grey eyes warily scanned the green hills beyond the park-like city. Again Harwell felt that he and his son were together, following the same impulse. They didn't know what they were looking for except that it would be unpleasant. Maybe a column of smoke—maybe a distant flash of incandescence—or something not so simple. Maybe they'd never know what hit them.

It was small comfort that the hills remained as placid as a painted landscape—patches of woods alternating with row on row of transparent plastic coils, through which water and green algae circulated to produce the basic substances from which almost any type of food could be synthesized. Here was one of Utopia's horns of plenty.

"In the street I just heard that all the robot police have been alerted,

[*Turn page*]

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Dad," Joey growled. "I also heard two guys mention that they were going to join *Mathais*. That would be the name of the violence-crowd or the phony moniker of their leader, wouldn't it? Ever hear it before?"

"Yeah, I did," Harwell answered, wondering at how much a youngster could pick up by just listening around.

"That wasn't what I came chasing after you for, though," Joey continued. "Old Big-Time Burris sent me. He wants to talk to you—about the Jupiter trip tomorrow, I guess. Says it's important." Joe wrinkled his nose.

Harwell felt the fury rise in him. "Burris' conception of importance!" he snapped. Then he checked himself. In part, perhaps, for duty's sake—because Burris was chief of the Histrionics Section for Ajax and his immediate boss. Though he hated now to be away from his son for even a minute and though he wanted to get to his wife and to talk to some friends as soon as he could.

"Okay, Joe," he said. "I'll finish the chat with Burris quick."

THEIR bodyguards followed them at a dogtrot back to the Ajax Tower. Harwell went alone to Burris' office, which was a dizzying elevator's flight up past the residence levels, and the great studio levels, where most of the sensipsych dreams were created. Up near the apex of the Tower.

The amount of shining plastic and metal in the big room far overstepped the limits of good taste and became a crudity. And Burris himself was of the same ilk. He was fat and dark and small. The smallness and cheapness of him extended beyond the physical.

"So you got here, Harwell," he grumbled. "Better late than never, they say. It's time for your briefing. The Jupiter adventure must be the biggest and best of them all! No lukewarm stuff this time, you hear? The great Harwells will be on their way tomorrow. You know—Mister and Missus and Sonny Boy.

"Oldest heart-snatcher in the universe but it never wears out. The worms love it. See that you throw in some good kid-in-danger incidents and make 'em seem real. Though, dammit, I'll have more trouble with the would-be humanitarians who don't understand that the danger is mostly a phony and want the youngster court-ordered out of the act.

"But I'll do *my* part. See that you folks do yours! And keep the sensory filters on your recorder discs adjusted nice and fine. We don't want any too-frightening sensations of falling or anything to get into the recordings.

"That stuff scares the worms and is bad for business. Stray thoughts of contempt for them are even worse. And having to clean up a recording after it's taken is inefficiency. We gotta keep the worms happy in their eternal rest, Harwell."

Burris' thick lips curled. In his expression there was immense distaste for the Great Public, caught in the net of the sensipsych. But there was also vast and smug approval of himself and the world as it was.

Bob Harwell had always regarded the Chief of Histrionics with a dry amusement before. He had a certain capacity for his job—a certain drive. But now the gorge rose in Harwell; he was sickened by the little man—for a dozen reasons that came to a focus at this moment. He didn't care to restrain himself from telling Burris off.

"Right now, Mr. Burris," he said almost casually, "you're off the beam in just about every way possible. We might all be dead tomorrow. Because some of the worms have turned. Which is one reason why the Harwells might not be blasting off for Jupiter.

"Another point—the important one—you're the only man I know who seems completely satisfied with the way things have been. Maybe you think that all you have to do is ride to glory, while civilization rots. You aren't smart enough to see danger."

Harwell paused. He looked down at Burris, wondering if the pleasure he found in the little man's popeyed expression of surprise and fear was too brutal. Then he decided to sound Burris

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out—try to find out just where he fitted in the bewildering complexity of society as it had become, with its vast technology meshed with the even greater imponderables of billions of human minds working separately.

Harwell had a desire to be helpful and to do that he had to find an attack-point—a definite objective. So may be he could taunt a loose thread out of Burris—find out whether or not he was a consciously evil part of the cancer that was chewing at civilization.

"Things as they are are on my conscience too, Burris," he said. "But I liked my work and I wasn't too anxious to see it cut off at the roots. Yet I've sometimes wondered if the whole sensipsych enterprise hasn't been, from start to finish, the core of a huge plot to anesthetize the human race and grab control.

"Yeah, something corny and crazy like that, as old as the hills and as childish. You'd think that by now we would have progressed enough so that guys who could reason along such lines would be as extinct as Pithecanthropus. Yet it sounds about your speed, Burris. Except that I don't think that you've got the cleverness or the guts to be the guy at the top.

"So maybe you're just a self-satisfied rider of a situation that came about by itself. Anyway you're very small potatoes, Burris. Now, do you want to fire me? Doing that doesn't seem to have much point anymore. But I doubt that even now you could make it stick—either with the public or with Ajax."

Up until this moment Burris had been too strangled with consternation and fury at Harwell's words, too fuddled at the news of outbreak coming at last, to make any reply. But now his voice came out in a thin squeak.

"Leave this room!" he shrilled. "Save your insults! Go talk to Schaeffer if you want to rave about a plot! If he'll ever admit you to his exclusive presence!"

Harwell bowed out mockingly. But he was not entirely proud of what he had done. He had really accomplished nothing and had only made an enemy. Burris was small—but possibly dangerous—potatoes.

Out in the hall Harwell found the shadowy presence of George Schaeffer clouding his thoughts. Master technician for the Ajax Company—the greatest living scientist—almost a legend. But just as surely as he had been chief inventor of the sensipsych so was he linked with the harm of it.

If not by intention, by implication of the failure of a better purpose. To be stopped now by the enigma of what sort of person Schaeffer was brought him a useless flash of anger against the scientist. But since Schaeffer seemed far out of his present reach he shoved it aside.

Hurry, hurry, hurry, seemed to be the rhythm of Harwell's pulses. He was trying to beat his imaginings of chaos as they rushed toward reality—trying to rend passage through an elusive web that seemed to leave him forever groping and stymied as in a nightmare.

CHAPTER IV

Run Like the Devil

UNWILLING to wait for an elevator Harwell ran down through five floors to the Histrionics department. Here in the Ajax Tower were the studios, the dressing rooms, the fantastic props. It was much like a motion-picture setup of two centuries ago except that in place of cameras and sound-apparatus there were only little sensipsych recorder-discs, to be placed behind the left ear of each important actor.

A girl in a glittering dress, looking like the fairy princess she was meant to be in the dreams, shouted at him, "Hi, Bob! So Midas didn't turn you to gold. We heard. Hope you burned Burris' ear."

A man with a hooked nose and the black robe and slouch hat of a melodramatic detective pushed past some ballet dancers and a clown dressed up

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as a big green frog. He said with lugubrious concern, "I'd like to help, Bob. We ought to all quit or at least go on a strike—or better yet commit suicide like the villain in my latest bit of art. Thus we could dry up the source of the dreams.

"We could smash a lot of recordings, too. Then the sick man, Mister Public, who sinks lower and lower and now has developed another split in his personality—showing a homicidal face—would have to seek his fun the old hard way and maybe recover. Of course I'm kidding, Bob. This litter of suckling hams all love their art too much to be that cooperative. And there'd only be a new crop of Smithfields."

A frightened-looking warrior from somebody's version of Lost Atlantis, voiced an opinion. "Maybe sleep and dreams are best. A couple of years ago Schaeffer is supposed to have said that modern life had grown too tense in its pleasure-seeking—that people needed a rest. And now there's a rumor around that he thinks it's time for the machines to take over—that maybe they can find a better reason than people for existing. But you know how rumors start."

Bob Harwell grinned as he shouldered his way through this Thespian domain. He liked these people. He himself had been born of a pair of troupers—rejuvenates on Mars when that planet was still a tough place to live. He was of the theatrical profession himself really—a public entertainer, too, in spite of being partly explorer and a scientist.

But now he felt disappointment. These troupers were a nice bunch. They'd help him if they could—if the help weren't too hard to give. Supposedly they lived more in the real world than had become the general custom.

But he wondered now if this were true. Theirs was also a sheltered realm of fantasy which they happened to see first hand. They were part of the velvet-masked peace of a world that had come to look outwardly like a pastoral painting.

Harwell broke free of them and hurried on to his original objective—a door marked simply, CORLISS. He pushed inside without knocking for Carl Corliss was his best friend. For which there were reasons. Corliss was a clown—a trouper like the others—but different.

At Harwell's unannounced entry he gave a start—ample evidence that he understood present realities—the poised disaster that might present itself in any form at any moment. But on recognizing Harwell he grinned his slow grin. His pale hard eyes took on a dry and gentle twinkle, as down-to-earth as steel.

It seemed plain, then as always, that he never obscured facts with romance. This was refreshing. Corliss was the austere sort of idealist. Maybe his fault was that he saw his facts too barrenly.

Bob Harwell gave a short laugh. "No, Carl—I'm not destruction," he said. "Say—what *is* this?"

Corliss had risen from the chair behind his desk, his string-bean stature unfolding toward the ceiling. It had been many months since he had played the part of a clown personally—for he had another line. With his narrow, skillful hands he blended a real recorded thought train with the visual point of view of a drawing to make a different sort of sensipsych vision.

Once in the movies there had been a thing called a talk-cartoon, inhabited by whimsical beings that never were. But now the kind of fan who had once laughed at the antics of Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse could *be* them and their ilk, via sensipsych—thanks to a whimsical streak in the tough nature of Carl Corliss. All of this was why the fact that Corliss was wearing his old checkered clown suit and battered hat seemed so strange.

"For sentiment, Bob," he laughed. "When I heard that the lid was blowing off I felt like getting into costume, maybe for the last time. Damn those *Mathais* birds—they shouldn't have tried to knock *you* off. Somebody ought to give 'em hell."

There was fury in Corliss' eyes, mixed with the glint of humor. Harwell figured that there was no situation pos-

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sible in which that kind of humor would be out of place.

"What are we going to do now, Carl?" he asked mildly. "We've got to do something!"

CORLISS' shrug was dry. "Maybe run like the devil," he said. "You want to throw your weight around, eh, Bob? So maybe you're thinking about rushing out like some old-style dick to try to track down this character or bunch with the corny name of *Mathais*, eh?

"Maybe you're going to destroy *Mathais*, or talk him or them out of what they plan to do. Oh, sure! Or else you're going to break the sensipsych's grip on people single-handed. Stumble over official obstacles—get all sensipsych broadcasts stopped until you can get a special recording on the air that'll make the dreamers ashamed of themselves, make them snap out of their bad habit.

"Uhunh—how often has all that been thought of before—even tried? So here you are—eager to fight an endless army of spiderwebs, Bob. That's all. Official buck-passing, established custom and the plain fact that things are so complicated, that nobody seems to know just what's what.

"And back of it all a vast mass of people who don't like themselves especially for the way they've been going to pot but who are like a high-principled tramp who is against stealing while standing too close to a cooling pie. But above and beyond all this is the plain fact that apart from just enjoying himself man seems to have worked his purpose in life out to a dead end.

"And how are you going to be reconciled with the fact that deep down you half agree with *Mathais'* method—even though it's probably crazy? No, it's too late, Bob. Maybe it never was early. Anyway the wheels have begun to roll, Bob—and they're too big for a thousand guys, let alone one. So where do we wind up—in a cave somewhere if we're still alive? Maybe that won't be so bad, eh?"

Bob Harwell met the hard gleam in his friend's eyes with a gleam that was equally hard. It was tough to have the facts that you knew thrown at you till they doubled the bitter strength of what you thought yourself. For the moment Harwell was lost.

"Yeah," he said. "Got to ride things out, I guess."

"I think we've got a few hours' time," Corliss mused, "before the Ajax Tower becomes a target. Building up nervous tension is part of warfare, you know. A little while must be allowed for the idea of danger to soak into people. So if you feel like it maybe you ought to sit tight with your family, Bob.

"Me—I've got a small personal errand to perform outside. I'll be back quick—or get in touch. *Woops*—can't wear this clown suit, can I? And did you know that the police already ordered a newscast blackout?"

Harwell was a little foggy from inner thinking as he left. He toyed with the idea of a sensipsych dream that didn't have his deeper thoughts—his contempt of the dreamers—filtered out of it. He might have tried getting one made and sneaking it past Burris and the other Ajax censors for broadcast if both personal inertia and belief that it wouldn't do much good hadn't stopped him.

Then he thought of the frigid dying moons of Jupiter again—and of the photographs, souvenirs and information brought back from them. Ruins that were perhaps only a few centuries deserted. And evidence not of extinction but of a vast migration. Where to?

Evidence also of a technology paralleling the human but surpassing it—and a grinding hum that could be picked up out there on a certain radio wavelength. Triangulation placed its point of origin deep in the dense poisonous atmosphere of Jupiter, where no life akin to that of Earth could exist without extravagant protection.

Harwell wondered if these thoughts hadn't been provoking the ghost of a hope in his subconscious mind even before he had decided that the next Harwell adventure would be on Jupiter. But that hope, dragged out into the open,

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still seemed very dim.

By elevator he went down to the residence levels of the Tower, where he and his family occupied an apartment while on Earth. Here he found out that he hadn't had breakfast. Clara was there, hiding her tensions with a smile, saying, "Leave your troubles outside, Mister," and pouring his coffee as if it were a vestal libation to the idea of hearth and home and a moment of rest.

Harwell was wondering fondly then as to how many trouper-women of the past, loving the gypsy road and hating it, had thus grasped at fleeting bits of domesticity and permanence, serving breakfast on top of a battered trunk in this town or that.

Of course, here in this magnificent apartment with its robot-kitchen, Clara didn't have to do anything like that. But the clutching at what a woman most wanted in spite of her Ulysses-urge remained with the same pathos, although Clara seemed to get along well with herself and the paradox in her—the love of home and the love of distance. Still, Harwell felt the guilt again, felt that somewhere here was something that was the fault of his own wanderlust.

He watched her large capable hands and felt a tender apology and a wish to make amends. And his eyes stole up over the rest of her, which was slender and small, topped with warm dark eyes that contrasted with her blond hair. She was Mars-born, too. She was cool and courageous.

ONCE, during the course of that breakfast he said, "If everybody were like you there wouldn't be the mess there is now."

She was feminine enough to call him a liar in the face of his earnestness—with a slightly clownish twinkle in her eye, of course. But he found the mood of relaxation that she built and rested within it in spite of everything.

And once, still pursuing the idea of somehow paying Clara back for the difficult years, Harwell said whimsically to his son, "What would you like to do most, Joe? Right now, I mean? If we could do just what we wanted?"

A kind of annoyed humor struck through the boy's sullenness. "I forgot my lines today, Dad," he grumbled. "Since we're not making a recording."

"Tell him that a month on the Maine coast would be nice, Joe," Clara prompted mildly, reiterating an old longing of hers for a spell of quieter living.

Harwell felt that stab of guilt again. "If we manage to get through the next few weeks all right we'll go—this time for sure," he said fervently.

Clara smiled but Joey's eyes showed eagerness for something else. "If there's any chance at all that we're still going out to Jupiter this corny modern-style Swiss Family Robinson had better get rolling to finish preparations," he grumbled.

Harwell grinned a goodbye to their minutes of rest. Harsh truth was back. The pastel-like scene of Utopia, spreading beyond their high-placed windows, still hadn't begun to tear through the middle. There was only an ominous blue murk along the sunlit horizon—as of some old-time forest fire. And it had an odor—of woodsmoke mixed with damp freshness.

Harwell wondered at the small amount of air and ground traffic. Some people would be fleeing the city, of course. But why hadn't a general exodus been ordered? The answers were easy. Human imaginations could not grasp beforehand the true extent of horror before it happened unless they had experienced it.

How many disasters in history had occurred because of that? And where could you dump the comfort-softened millions that filled a metropolis of this size? There were other cities too. Harwell's expression grew grimmer.

In another moment Joey and Clara and he were in the cluttered living room, where trunks that had been in many a far-flung camp stood open. The place was a shambles except where a large canvas was carefully spread out.

On that canvas precision was absolute master—the kind of precision that

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takes lives and the hope of eternal youth through rejuvenation in its hands and flaunts them before the gods of death as if they were cheaper even than life used to be when it wore out in less than a century.

A special vacuum armor had been disassembled there for inspection down to its minutest part. A vacuum armor ten times as massive as the regulation space suit—for it was meant to withstand the unthinkable atmospheric pressures deep in giant Jupiter.

That armor offered vivid suggestion of what dangers might lie out there—not even considering the evidence that there might be also an intelligent living race of beings, sprung not from Earth—something never yet seen by Earthians. For the ancient Martians and Mercurians had become extinct long ago. Something weird and strange . . .

Bob Harwell felt guilt again as he thought of dragging Clara and Joe into such unknowns. If it happened . . . But now he did not yet know what they would do. They'd meant to go, of course—but now it all seemed to depend on other factors.

The Harwells proceeded to reassemble the vacuum armor. Then there were two more of smaller sizes to take apart and inspect and put together. The day rolled on. Why was Corliss so long in reporting back? Bob Harwell felt somehow that word from his friend must be like a compass or weather vane—a thing from which to choose a course.

Tension began to build up once more. Once Joey expressed a vagrant bit of kid-whimsy but not of a pleasant sort. "I wonder what'll happen to this room," he mused. "Will it be all vaporized by heat—stones, steel and everything? Or will it just melt down?"

"We don't know for sure that anything will happen, Joe," Clara said reassuringly.

This might even—possibly—be true. Still, thinking of that was no comfort. It only made uncertainty more taut and complete. The second hand of the clock on the wall moved silently and you couldn't guess when or if it would stop moving or would even cease to exist.

Sundown closed in and then night, with distant red glows in the sky. Police aircraft whined, patrolling. Then the quiet fog closed in—for a purpose, of course. With weather control perfected there was no fog unless, in the weather-towers, someone moved switches. Now it hid the city. Two and a half centuries ago, before radar, it might have been a real protection.

After supper the phone rang. Harwell leaped to the instrument. He heard Corliss' voice, distant and gasping, just vaguely recognizable. "Bob—get out of the Ajax Tower. Tell the others. Because, at sunup—"

After that there was just silence though Harwell shouted, *"Carl!"* into the phone repeatedly.

CHAPTER V

Schaeffer

NEVER before had he so cursed the fact that the visiphone—fitted with television so that the two conversing parties could see each other's faces—had never become widely popular. People in general preferred more privacy.

But a visiphone would have helped him to know where Corliss was and whether he had been captured, wounded or what. It would have let him know why his friend had gasped, why there had been something strange otherwise about his voice, almost as if he had tittered.

Yes, though at antipodes from each other in meaning, a laugh of humor and a titter of hysteria could sound almost the same. Though it was hard to imagine a tough number like Carl Corliss giving way to hysteria. But it things got really bad it could happen to anyone.

Cold sweat broke out on Harwell's body. "It was Carl, warning everybody out of the Tower," he said to his wife

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and son. "But he was cut off and there was something wrong."

In a moment, the robot-voice of Information, pleasant as that of the young woman from whom it was recorded, told Harwell in effect that any search for his friend would be hopeless.

"Your call came by radio contact from an unlisted and probably mobile station—perhaps an auto or aircraft—a hundred miles north of the city. Contact has since been lost. Also outgoing calls have now been banned for security. Sorry."

Harwell couldn't leave his family now to go on any futile wild-goose chase. So maybe it was, "So long, Carl," for good. It was tough to say goodbye to somebody who might have been your pal for the next ten thousand years, or more.

Joey seemed to be fighting tears. But he said, "There's still Schaeffer, Dad. Maybe he's okay. Go see him. Find out where he stands. Maybe he can help. Anyway, we'll know better, afterward, what to do. His lab is very near."

"Go see Schaeffer?" Harwell questioned mildly. "That would take the influence of a potentate. You'd have to apply for an interview months in advance."

Joey's face reddened as if at a blunder. But Clara came to his rescue. "Who says that we—you—all of us—haven't got influence, Bob?" she demanded. "Doesn't almost everybody know the Harwells—and where they are supposed to be going tomorrow?"

The ray of light was probably false. But certainly Bob wanted to see Schaeffer. What was beginning now was war—not between nations with sharply defined territorial boundaries but something more elusive and secret and treacherous, hidden within the fabric of society in these times.

And be he fool, superman, devil or saint—or some blend of all four—Schaeffer was still the key man of this epoch. So, to know him better was perhaps the same as knowing how to deal with the epoch better—even though hope remained tainted with anger, suspicion and questioning.

Corliss' warning made the danger lurking in each passing moment more sharp. But when Harwell weighed risk against possible profit he found the latter worth the delay.

"All right," he said. "And, just in case—see if you can find out whether the liner *Artemis* will still blast off for Mars at three A.M."

He got out of the apartment and dropped r a p i d l y by elevator. Yes, Schaeffer *was* near as far as distance went. Just a few hundred feet, straight down, beneath the Ajax Tower. But to ordinary conceptions this might have been a few hundred million miles as far as attainability went.

For this underground retreat was a gigantic fortress, encased in steel and lead and concrete, not to mention a web of guardian and detecting devices and a screen of human wardens. It was all so complex and perfect that Harwell wondered if Schaeffer himself was even half aware of how well he was shut away from all intrusion.

Very soon Harwell faced a uniformed policeman. Directness was the only means of entry that had occurred to him. So he said simply, "I'm Bob Harwell of the Histrionics Section. I want to talk with Dr. Schaeffer—*now*. It's important."

The policeman spoke in low tones over an announcer system with a person or persons unknown. It took no more than a minute.

After that the way was far easier than Harwell could ever have imagined—so much so that it was confusing. His first impulse was to be elated, thinking that this showed that his visit was welcome—that Schaeffer was a right guy and that they would work together on the same great problem.

But, on the other hand, so deep was the unknown ahead and so unnaturally easy did entry seem that sometimes he felt like bolting, fearing a trap or capture for some imponderable purpose. He was told respectfully to wait. In five minutes he was led through massive doors.

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BEING admitted here was like seeing the wheels, the machinery, of modern civilization, always hidden from sight before—as are the works of some beautiful porcelain clock. Vast generators hummed. Lights flashed on and off in tremendous banks of calculating devices that could think billions of times faster than any living brain.

Here you had the feeling that the whole universe was being taken apart, down to the minutest fundamental beyond the meson and electron, and studied until there was nothing left to know. Of course this impression was to some extent illusion.

But Harwell was still lost among conflicting possibilities about what Schaeffer was. Did he live in too sheltered a way to understand the true impact of the things he had created? It hardly fitted the reasonable conception of a great scientist but he might even be a twisted monster, whose goal was strictly selfish and destructive.

There was a moment too when, briefly, Bob Harwell saw the machines around him—ruled by Schaeffer and almost a projection of his personality—in a different light. They seemed to glorify Schaeffer beyond the human. And for that moment of unproven speculation they looked like grandiose props—tawdry tinsel meant to create an impression—like the gaudy medals on the chest of some weak-chinned heir to a nineteenth century throne.

Another guard appeared and said, "This way, Mr. Harwell." They went down a corridor. "Right here, Mr. Harwell," the guard told Bob. "Stand still, please. Okay—now turn around slowly."

Bob Harwell saw the white screen of the instrument. Fluoroscopy—for possible weapons.

"So far, so good," said the guard. "I see that you psych all right too—more or less. But we'll be watching—through the walls. If you turn buggy we can stop you before you do anything. Go ahead. That door. It's open. Good luck!"

The door was like any door. Bob tapped, then pushed it aside. It had already been partly ajar.

The room was medium-sized, well-lighted and full of books. There was a work-table. In one corner was a cot—still not made up. A crumpled sports shirt lay across it. The lack of affectation here was so complete that to many it might have been crude and offensive.

Dr. George Schaeffer got up from the table and said, "Hello, Harwell." Bob had glimpsed this legendary person in the flesh only a few times in his life, though on Earth they lived within a thousand feet of each other. But of course Schaeffer's identity was obvious. He was just his many published photographs come alive—plus an easy grin.

It seemed as simple as that. Bob Harwell was at first immeasurably thankful. But simplicity is sometimes complex beyond fathoming. And the first part of this complexity, as far as Bob was concerned, was his simple consternation that Schaeffer could be like this. He had expected something far different.

"You know me?" Harwell asked.

It was strange but Schaeffer's large mellow eyes looked almost hurt. "Doesn't just about everybody?" the mild voice inquired with some hint of defense.

"I suppose so," Bob answered. Beyond all expectation he felt slightly foolish, as if his question were one with an obvious answer.

"Contrary to report I do enjoy the sensipsych when I can find a little time—mostly for information," Schaeffer said. "The Harwell adventures included. So please sit down and get the important matters you want to talk to me about off your chest.

"We have a kinship, being both fellow employees of the great Ajax Company—though, I think, also being both honored somewhat beyond *that* honor in our own right and without any subservience." Here, Schaeffer laughed softly. "Since you are what you are, Harwell," he continued, "I'm very glad that you came. So—shoot!"

Again Bob was prompted toward complete directness as the only possible

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approach, though before Schaeffer's elusiveness he felt naive, forced into a disadvantage, perhaps even in danger—if, for instance, he said the wrong things.

"You must know why I'm here," he growled. "To find out if our mutual kinship of being part of the sensipsych industry gives you, at this time of outbreak, the same feeling of responsibility and desire to make amends that it does me. If this is so—and if, as you should be, you are wiser than I—I want to offer my help and accept your directions.

"I know that the sensipsych has value—in medicine, in schools. What to do about its harmful side and about all that has happened to date is what escapes me. I'm thinking here, mostly of the immediate present—though the future must be considered, too. Things are hard to grasp.

"The whole picture of the world today is obscured by human conflicts and cussedness, talk of dead-ends, even rumors of robots taking over. I don't even know what team you're pitching for. If you are—forgive me—in some way stupid or willfully guilty of anything, I want to know it, so that I can decide for myself what to do."

Schaeffer's mobile features, framed by his scraggy locks, seemed to riffle through a swift spectrum of emotions of many shades—harassment, humor, anger, contrition—even humility. But always his gaze remained fixed on Harwell as if studying him intently.

IN the end his face crystallized into an expression of eagerness, as for abstract argument. But that could be acting, just as his outward aspect at other times might be.

"Now we're deep in philosophy, Harwell," he said. "Thanks for being frank. But how am I going to tell you what sort of a person I am, since probably there is no person who knows himself completely? As for your other confusions, perhaps I am as much troubled by the elusiveness of things as you are.

"As for the present rather deadly situation, do you suppose that I have all of its hidden details so well in hand, possess so much power that I have merely to pull strings—as if the world were my puppet?

"As for the sensipsych—or more properly the dead-end produced by a science advanced enough to provide an abundance of material things, security and pleasure without effort—and the future of the human race, they are dependent upon what qualities are to be considered good or bad in man.

"Our ancestors were proud battlers, Harwell. Their descendants remain the same, though they sometimes seem to have nothing left to battle except their proud viewpoint, which makes them unhappy. Science could end this unhappiness simply by cutting this honored and primitive pride out of man, so that he could accept his peace and dreams for all of his remaining future. It can even be argued that this is a good solution. So where are we except more confused?

"Or, beyond the blank wall of an apparently worked-out usefulness so many people feel it could be claimed that there is greater good in human extinction and the glitter of hardier machines. You see, Harwell, I neither cheer nor jeer your trite robot-rumor.

"There is also the solution of a reversion to a more primitive state of culture at the price of much bloodshed—as seems to be the situation in point now.

"But for me personally and for certain others, probably including yourself, there is no problem of dead-ends. I can't conceive of my being bored or purposeless or disinterested for the next thousand years at least. There's a drive in certain people, an eagerness, a difference in mental metabolism. We're lucky, Harwell."

Schaeffer stopped talking.

Harwell liked some of what he had heard. It was what he did not hear that worried him. "Aren't you going to say any more?" he demanded at last.

Schaeffer shook his head, his lips a thin, smiling line. "Not what you want me to say," he answered. "Why should I advise you when I could be mistaken?

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When you've already hinted that you might mistrust me? When I might mistrust you in the same way? I know what was found on the moons of Jupiter and it is no great trick to guess what idea is in your mind. But do precisely what you want to, Harwell."

Schaeffer's gaze grew dreamy, far away, even a little annoyed. Bob Harwell felt the cold breeze of a swift brushoff. It was as if the scientist had wrung him dry of whatever about him he had wanted to learn and now wanted to be rid of him.

"Look," Harwell urged. "People will be dying—millions of them. Maybe you could help arrange a compromise with *Mathais*."

Schaeffer shook his head without visible emotion. "Maybe I could," he said. "Maybe I see that as futile. Maybe the difficulty is between the people and something in themselves, of which *Mathais* is almost a symbol. Yes, people who are not used to the thought of dying—ever.

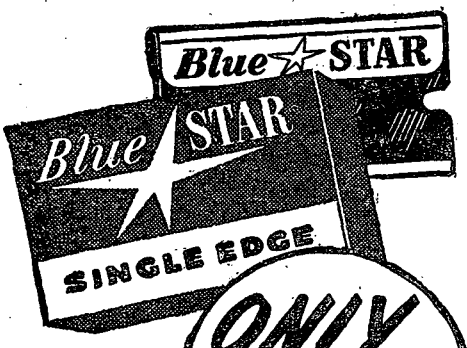
"So we are both aware of this obsolete phase of biology, Harwell. But we are not gods—we only try to be. And chaos is already in motion. Speaking of biology, when you came here I was deep in a problem of that category in some respects. I consider it important. It has kept me busy for months. I wish to return to it, Harwell. So may I say goodbye and good luck?"

Bob Harwell left the great underground fortress feeling fury and bitterness toward Schaeffer, feeling defeated and more than ever up against a blank wall. What he had learned of the scientist had only deepened the mysteries behind him. And having seen him and heard him talk only made the dark complexity of the world more immense.

But Bob found some defiant strength in defeat. Because he had to cling to something, a certain hope he had about Jupiter, moved into clearer focus. "Okay—we'll work alone!" he said to his wife and boy, when he got back to

[*Turn page*]

A DIME BUYS A DOLLAR'S WORTH OF SHAVING PLEASURE!



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the apartment. "Try to do what we can without worrying about the rest. I'll tell you about my idea presently. Is the *Artemis* blasting off on schedule?"

"Maybe a little late," Clara answered.

In the wee hours of the morning the Harwells were down in the street level of the Ajax Tower with their mountain of luggage and equipment to await transportation by space-line bus to the port. They had come this far without harm. Their wait should be brief but now everything was uncertain. Private traffic had been stopped within the city by the police for it was hoped that thus enemy movements could be checked.

SOME of the many people who lived in the Tower were slipping away on foot into the fog, carrying light hand-luggage. Joey had been spreading Corliss' warning. Their faces looked bewildered. They didn't know where to go.

The many more who so far stayed behind were just as fuddled. They crowded the lobby. They smoked and fidgeted. One little actress kept telling everybody brightly, "We're fairly safe here with all this concrete and steel over our heads. And I'll bet nothing will happen anyway."

Harwell found himself admiring her. She was both heroine and fool. He wanted to urge these people out into the night—but then he did not know that they wouldn't be in greater danger there. They were like helpless sheep, huddled together. He felt it too—though he remained cool—too cool, perhaps, for his or his family's good.

The treachery of inertia was on him, bogging him down. He knew this but he couldn't seem to get rid of it. He knew how it was with the people around him—prompted by fear to strike out from home, away from all familiar comfort but held back by the fear of newness, and the possibility that nothing would happen.

The surroundings were bleak as public places are apt to be at night. Across the lobby a door was partly ajar. Behind a desk a man was asleep in a chair —with a sensipsych band around his head—dreaming. He had found escape. He looked half young, half old and really quite hideous. His outer skin, as wrinkled as that of a witch, was coming off in patches like a chrysalis. It meant a century sloughed away.

The skin beneath was as fresh as a baby's. He had been to a Vita Center. In the tanks the infirmities of the years had been soaked out of his flesh. There was a smug smile on his face as he slept through a pretty sensipsych dream. His shrunken gums, that presently would have sprouted teeth again—if it weren't for the nearness of another doom—seemed to chew on something.

Harwell turned away. So he knew that the sensipsych broadcasts still went on. Schaeffer could probably have had them stopped. To the *Mathais* bunch it might mean willingness to negotiate. It might have halted a juggernaut.

But Harwell thought more pointedly of Corliss' last warning words to him. *"Because at sunup—"* The smoky murk in the east, to which the news-blackout allowed no public explanation for minds that might be stricken with greater panic, already showed the promise of daylight.

Harwell decided to be cheerful. He turned to his wife and boy, who stood beside him. "Well," he said, "we'll soon be blasting off in the *Artemis*. The stars welcoming us back to space. Out to Malu, Mars. Then on to Ganymede in our own ship. Then Jupiter. It'll be good to be moving again."

Both Clara and Joey brightened. Joey said, "Dad—you didn't tell us yet what your new idea is—going to Jupiter means something special now, doesn't it?"

"It does, Joe," Harwell answered. "Something that encompasses my most fervent hope and doubt. The ancient Martians, who certainly weren't human physically, had steam-engines fifty million years ago that were almost like the Earthly variety of a couple of centuries back.

"They had radio, television, fluorescent lights. And they destroyed them-

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selves with atomic weapons. They didn't get as far as the sensipsych. But what I'm trying to say is that certain basic inventions are inevitable, wherever brains think and invent. Parallel reasoning and universal physical principle make this so.

"Even on Earth the bow and arrow were probably invented separately in dozens of different places. And you saw the little gadgets that were sent to us from Ganymede. The path of progress is always much the same.

"What I'm hoping is that somewhere there's a race that has advanced far enough beyond us to have broken clear of this dead-end period, to have found something bigger. Maybe we can bring the secret of it back to Earth with us."

Clara's brows creased. Joey's eyes widened with awe. Neither said anything. The words he had spoken sounded a little crazy to Harwell himself. Yet he figured there was good logic in them.

Harwell's spirits rose high for a moment. He even thought of his parents and wished that there were a little time to stop over on Mars and see them.

The sky in the east was brightening fast. Still the space-line bus hadn't come. Sunup was very near.

CHAPTER VI

Neighborhood Chump

ANSON NORD'S panic increased with the gradual loss of verisimilitude from the Mercurian adventure. The interior of the Dark Side Station's mess hall around him began to shimmer like a mirage. The faint redness behind the visual impressions increased.

His wife's face—echoed from his mind for Clara Harwell to wear as a mask—became just a blank oval. The rich dream-food in his mouth lost both substance and taste. The tightness in his lungs became suffocating.

The idea that this was retribution for weakness began to spin in his head. So now both reasoned will and the ancient instinct of self-preservation began to fight the web of sensory illusion that had been artificially induced in his brain. Nord struggled toward reality.

Emergence from a sleep that was a little like hibernation, was slow. It was also more and more unpleasant. Even when he at last managed to open his eyes two existences, one real and one borrowed, seemed to hang one behind the other like transparent veils.

From one there still came a thin reminder of Joey Harwell's voice, saying, "There used to be jungles here on this frozen, night-side hemisphere, Pop. When Mercury still rotated on its axis and there were dense clouds to cut down the blazing sunshine."

It sounded flat now and like what it was intended to be—the lecturing of a guide to a horde of sensipsych tourists.

From that other existence—the harshly true one—came muffled shouts and screams, the choking acridness of smoke, black shifting shadows, the redness of flames.

When he got the picture of truth as clearly as that Anson Nord broke away from the sensipsych sequence as from a spiderweb tether.

He stumbled stiffly from the couch to his feet, jerked the needles and tubes of the intravenous feeding apparatus from his arms. He was ready to try to run—but an old protective urge, more ancient than the flesh of man, drove him in another direction, away from flight. Sluggishly, for his metabolism had not yet risen to its normal level after the sleep, he reached over to the other couch, freed his wife from the tubes and needles and then shook her.

"Marge!" he said thickly. "Hey—*Marge!*"

It took maybe two minutes to bring her to a semblance of consciousness.

"An—what in the world? Darn you—" she mumbled.

At first she sounded more or less like herself when she was mildly annoyed. But her reaction changed to a thin intake of breath as she began to be aware

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of something amiss around her.

She staggered erect and her arms went around Nord, half as if to seek shelter, half to give it. "Darling!" she stammered. "Do be careful!" Nord was dazed himself but his impression of her was sharp against the background of confused circumstance. He had never known Margaret's voice to be quite so tender. It sounded like the voice of a mother, responding to the outcry of her child at midnight.

But this state of mind in her was fleeting. Her face seemed to hang before him and by the red flicker on it he saw the fuddled softness go out of her eyes, saw understanding coming into them. For an instant she looked almost as she usually did. Then comprehension of grim facts for which she was not at all prepared became far too clear for her. They seemed to touch her mind like a red-hot iron.

Something in her shriveled or broke like brittle glass. In the light of the flames her features were so contorted with terror that she was like a person Nord did not know at all. She became an animal thing with no resemblance to the smooth glossy creature that was his wife.

It was as though her brain was stunned by realities to which she was so unaccustomed, as though there was nothing left active in her but the quivering reflexes of seared nerves.

At first she clung to him furiously. But then, in reaction, she thrust him off just as furiously. As she broke away from him her sharp fingernails ripped long ragged scratches in one of his cheeks.

"*Margaret!*" he yelled. But then a greater immediacy gripped him. On the floor a rug was still smouldering. And the flames had crept into the contents of a bookrack. He leaped at the fire, stamping and kicking at it. The blaze was not large and the construction of the house, of course, was fireproof. Under Anson Nord's wild attack the flames were soon killed.

Singed and spent Nord looked around, trying still to grasp meanings. By the flickering light from the street he saw that a window had been smashed. The incendiary must have thrown his torch into the house by that route.

"Get hold of yourself, Marge," Nord gasped. "Stick close to me."

She was a little less wild now. He heard the thin wheeze of her breathing near his shoulder. Untempered by ruggedness or danger before this, she was a flat failure now.

"An," she quavered. "Is this our home—our neighborhood?"

He found her hand and squeezed it with trembling fingers.

THERE were shrieks outside. Bushes rattled as some creature, probably human, tore through them and ran on, his footsteps pounding. Nord's mouth was dry and there was a raw ache around his heart and in his throat. He pulled his wife toward the window that had been shattered and peered out.

The scene had gone primitive—savage—out of all harmony with this age as it had been. Down the street a small warehouse was burning. Frightened shapes ran. There was a blue-white flash like lightning a mile or more away in the darkness—then a rolling concussion.

Someone was using a Midas Touch pistol. The flare of the blast, reflected from the cloudy sky, revealed something sprawled in the road like a bundle of rags. Gentle controlled rain was washing away the pool of blood beside it. Margaret screamed.

A shadow loomed outside the window, where the flowerbeds were. It separated into two shapes. "Nord—are you there?" a voice croaked. It was Melton Harms' voice—he of the sultanic contraband visions.

"Yes," Nord replied warily. "What are you prowling for? Who's with you?" Smoke gave Nord a fit of coughing.

Nord's suspicion aroused in Harms a blaze of fury. "You damned fool!" he snapped. "I'm not prowling! I saw the blaze inside your house and thought I'd try to help you. They fixed me almost an hour ago—broke into my home,

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smashed everything, beat me up, killed my wife . . ." Harms' speech was half snarl, half sob. His words fairly drilled into Nord's entrails, making him want to vomit.

"They? *Who?*" Nord snapped quaveringly. "What good does it do you, Harms, to say I'm sorry?"

"Who?" Harms echoed. "Why, you imbecile—you're still asleep! What were we talking about not so long ago? What was that crazy Ellwynn Carpenter talking about? He must be one of them—now. Men—that's who. Guys with black scarves tied around their faces. Youngsters mostly. A few have the name *Mathais* on their scarves.

"You know their theory, don't you, Nord?" Harms' tone dripped bitter sarcasm. "'Arise! Lose the weakness of this doomed era in your own defense! Become strong again, in the presence of danger! Save the destiny of the race!' Yeah!

"One of those hitherto repressed sadists, which secret organizations are bound to attract, even lectured me on the idea. Because I didn't crawl too much he said I wasn't hopeless—that I was fit to live!"

Only minutes before Nord had been torn from a dream by panic. Now he yearned to believe that dream the reality, this reality only a nightmare. He ached to drift back, to see again the soft sunset of Mercury. It was like wanting to crawl into a hole and hide.

But the fury in him was more choking than the smoke that filled his house. He moved to the street-door and unlocked it. Compassion filled him—there had never before in his life been a reason for it to be so strong.

"Come inside, Harms," he said. "Bring whoever is with you."

"It's Mrs. Kovis," Harms answered before Nord could see her clearly in the uncertain shadows. "She's gone bleary-eyed nuts. It's too much of a change for her—opera-visions to this. I found her wandering in the road. She doesn't know where her husband is. Nord—what are we gonna do? Why don't the police-robots come?"

"How would I know?" Nord countered dully. Then some recent thinking of his came back to his mind and unwarily he expressed it aloud.

"What has happened serves us right though. We all saw what was coming. We couldn't think of anything to do about it. We were too feeble. This is supposed to be the antidote. Maybe some of these *Mathais* guys believe that they're martyrs—doing something big and good."

Then he knew that it was a mistake to talk like this. As he helped Harms guide the dazed Mrs. Kovis to a chair he heard his wife's ragged gasp. Margaret had been quiet for a minute as if stunned. Now hysterical laughter broke from her. Between the wild titters she managed to sandwich words.

Her personality came apart at the seams completely. She had recovered a little from her first awful terror but what remained of it still made her not the bored gentle brittle Marge that Nord knew—but a shrieking unreasonable harridan who sought a scapegoat on which to blame her misfortunes.

"Ah!" She tittered. "You defend the creatures that are doing this to us! I always had a suspicion that there was something chaffy and empty and stupid about you! My own husband!"

"No, Marge—I'm *not* defending them," Nord denied, trying to sound gentle.

"You *are!*" she yelled, coughing. "You've always complained in your roundabout way that we are feeble in mind and body! Now you think that you have a right to be smug, saying, without words, 'I told you so.'

"And in this terrible moment that is being a beast too—like them, whoever they are. Look what they've done to our nice house! And we may be killed—do you realize *that*, Anson Nord?"

Nord tried to hold himself in—to be reasonable. Treat Margaret like a peevish child that must be soothed. He grasped her shoulders and shook her gently. "Please, honey," he urged, "take it easy, will you? We've got enough trouble."

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But her courage was not equal to it. She hit him. And the raw anger welled up in him beyond control. "Shut up!" he snapped. He squeezed her arms, hard. She struck him again.

OUT of the sounds of that mad night the purr of a big automobile, stopping in front of the house, was almost meaningless. But the horn of the car sounded once—a lilting bugle call, which Margaret Jones Nord recognized.

"Daddy!" she cried. She was like a toddler calling for succor—from all the ills of her toppled universe. She broke away from her husband, ran to unlatch the door for Charles Jones, her father. He burst into the smoky house. Almost certainly he had heard some of the altercation between his daughter and his son-in-law.

Charlie Jones was a big man and young again by the Vita processes. Margaret threw herself into his arms. "It's terrible here, Daddy!" she shrilled. "And An has turned horrid, too! Get me out of here. Oh, get me out of here!"

Nord stood like a wooden image there in the firelit shadows—no one had dared turn on a light for fear of drawing murderous attention. He stood there, not knowing what to say or do. Margaret had been the center of his otherwise not-too-satisfying life. But now she was different. Everything was different and he was lost.

She wasn't equal to what had happened. Nor, in his own way, was he. Even the cavemen, hardened to danger, must have run in terror from the calamities of their time—the forest fires, volcanoes, floods, attacking beasts and warring neighbors. But in this modern era there were few who had any experience with fury to soften its shock.

Yet the primal mood was infectious in other ways. Charlie Jones had been a peaceable sort but for a moment it seemed that he would start throwing fists at Anson Nord. In the end his lips only curled, as with some ingrained contempt of man for man in this age, and a willingness to believe suggestions of worthlessness.

"Keep away, Nord," he growled. "I've heard enough! I've come to take Margaret to my country place—to safety. The other lady may come too if she likes. *You* stand aside!"

Nord followed them dully as far as the door. Once Marge looked back, a flicker of startlement and tenderness showing through the fear in her eyes. But now another voice spoke—from the radio in the car. It seemed that the blackout of the newscast was ended.

"Order! *Order!*" the voice commanded. "The robot police will soon regain control. There will be no danger. Go back to the sensipsych. It's the best way to relax. It's soothing." No one present knew that the person speaking was Dr. George Schaeffer.

Margaret seemed to leap at the words as toward an island of comfort and reassurance. She had a childlike will to believe the best even when it meant blinding herself to facts.

"See—An!" she shrilled back at him. "You're such a fool! Why didn't you tell me that everything is going to be all right? Now I've *got* to go. I could never dream again—here."

Out of the night two children ran. The little girl had blood on her cheek. Both were crying. Then Anson Nord witnessed what might have seemed a minor miracle. In the fire-glow Margaret looked more scared than ever. But her hand went out—to touch a small shoulder awkwardly.

"Dad," she stammered, her tone soft and confused. "They're lost. We've got to take them with us. We could leave word for their parents about where they are. Mrs. Kovis, help me with them!"

Marge was actually pleading. Something special and warm had been forced out in her by contrasting violence. Something that had never had a chance even to be aware of its own existence, much less to express itself during all the Utopian years.

Nord was somehow grateful. He didn't try to stop his wife from leaving. It was hopeless. And even had he succeeded it would have been cruel. She would perhaps be safer with her father.

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Dully he watched the big car splash off through the rain—in a setting of movement and sound and shadow that, from being idyllic but a few hours before, had changed to a scene ripped from a tribal war of half a million years ago, even from some lesser corner of Hades.

The big car departed. It was propelled by shielded atomic power. And attached to its steering apparatus was a special radar-guide which could keep it on any road and could halt or divert it from any collision that could happen. It too had the mark of a very recent yesterday. It was wonderful and safe—yet somehow a little contemptible.

"Now your woman is gone too," Harms grumbled sympathetically from beside Nord. "In addition to everything else, friend, you're just another poor neighborhood chump, deserted by his selfish wife."

CHAPTER VII

First Test

NORD heard these words without feeling the slightest desire to strike the bleeding swollen grief-stricken face at his shoulder. Though he still loved the memory of Marge, rather surprisingly, he found himself admiring Harms of the close-set eyes. He had a certain cynical yet simple kind of nerve, a sour warmth, no very obvious self-pity. Even now there was humor somewhere in him.

"Don't talk if you don't want to," Harms added. "Me—I'm going back to my place. Maybe I'll do what the man said—though he's probably nuts. Relax via sensipsych. Does that sound like me?"

He was gone then like a shadow and Nord was not sorry. Except for one compelling attraction his own empty torn-up house was about as inviting as a grave. It was only that the sensipsych was there. Escape. Mightily he wished to retreat—to the mists of polar Mars, perhaps, to the red deserts and the weird hardy plant life growing in the dry cold thinness. Thrilling, beautiful, wild—full of ages of history and romance. But in sensipsych form as harmless as reading a book.

He fought the morbid urge, which in spite of everything he knew was morbid. For his weakness and confusion before danger had now been fairly thrown into the face of his pride.

Moving against fear he stumbled away through the rain toward the shopping center of the suburb. He passed another sprawling corpse, its flesh giving off a burnt smell. He did not look to see what neighbor had lost eternity.

Ahead he saw movement limned against fire. A capsule-shaped thing erect on caterpillar treads—a police robot, which must have come cross-country—a thing meant to protect him. Men far away in safe stations would be seeing through its television eyes and guiding its movements.

It was pursuing two youths, who wore melodramatic black scarves over their faces. No doubt they were devotees of the corrective powers of violence. Nord shut his eyes to a terrific blaze of light. The crash of sound followed. When Nord looked again the boys who had sought to help remake civilization, were only two pairs of legs, writhing in a rain-puddle.

Nord subdued the urge to run in the opposite direction. People rushed past him, whimpering, crying. He could see and feel in his own viscera how most of them felt even about a protective apparatus like a police robot. It still had harsh wolfish lines and movements.

That in itself was enough to produce revulsion in their softened souls, unused to things that did not wear pretty masks. They were running away—running back to the sensipsych. He could see it in their faces. Better, it seemed to them, to let death creep up on them unawares while they dreamed—than meet the blunt horror with eyes open.

During these moments, Anson Nord, who had been mild and tolerant, hated them just as he hated the thoughts and

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feelings that were in himself. Scare these people out of their weakness—away from the sensipsych? It seemed to him then that the whole crazy theory was working in reverse. He wondered bitterly if such people were worth saving as the horde of them retreated past him. But there were a few who were not scared speechless. Once he overheard a fleeting fragment of conversation. It's the newness and shock, Frank. We'll adjust. As in old-time war. Folks are always a little like this—at first. We're not mice."

Nord felt slightly better. He thought of his neighbor, Dave Clinton, who must be of better mettle. Then a pretty girl, a teen-ager, whom he remembered seeing around town, shouted at Nord as she passed.

"You're going the wrong way, Mister! Unless you want to get caught by the fanatics. It was up on Norman's Hill that most of them landed, I think."

She was swept on with the crowd. But in her too he sensed the signs of a tougher brass.

Norman's Hill—Nord looked up at its wooded bulk, black against the sky, which had begun to reveal signs of dawn. Nearing the shopping district he turned into a side street that climbed toward the hill. He didn't know quite why except that he was fighting his fears, was drawn by curiosity, did not have any special place to go.

He knew the trail up the hill well. He began to follow it, wondering how unwary he was being, whether he was about to die. But self-hatred kept driving him. He picked up an oak branch to use, perhaps, as a club. Near the hilltop he thought he heard footsteps in dry leaves, so he diverted his course along a circuitous path.

What he saw at last, as he peered from behind bushes, was a small ship, usable either for atmospheric or space flight. It sat there on rough rocks. Good sense was just telling him that it could not be as deserted as it seemed—that it would not have been left unguarded—when someone growled behind him.

Like a machine whose controls are pressed, he obeyed—to face two masked youths and two Midas Touch pistols. Considering the nature of the *Mathais* theory he did not expect anything so mild as capture. So he experienced that ultimate helplessness, with dark eternity yawning instead of centuries of mellow living.

BUT at one point the picture was wrong. These young men, though they were in rebellion against a gentle era, were still part of it. They were afraid of death and afraid of inflicting it. Violence was as new to them as to Nord.

Perhaps that they had been left behind to guard the ship, while their companions had gone forth to terrorize the town, was evidence that they were the most chicken-hearted. So their hands, holding the pistols, trembled. Their flesh—not their weapons—was weak.

Nord saw and, goaded by panic and by an instinct as old as life, his muscles reacted. With all his might he hurled his club straight at these two. They wavered, ducked. Nord's heavy body crashed into them a split second after the club.

Now he used his wildly flailing arms and his feet. He kicked the youths in their stomachs and faces, his nerves taking revenge for their desire to destroy him, stopping at last in shame, just short of killing, many seconds after they were unconscious.

Tears came into his eyes as he looked at their bloodied features, from which the black scarves had fallen. They might easily be idealists, conceiving themselves to be selfless crusaders if appearances meant anything, even as there were sadists.

They wanted a better world and were at least trying for it though their method might be very wrong. Nord understood the train of thought behind their revolt because he had experienced much of it himself. He hoped that in knocking these boys senseless he had prevented them from resisting when the robot police came, had thus saved their lives.

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A twig snapped behind him, and he wheeled again to do battle. It had stopped raining. In the brightening dawn he saw another young man, so much of the same type as his recent adversaries that he hardly recognized him at first. Nord was puffing from exertion but his shoulders hunched and his fists balled automatically.

"*No!*" the kid pleaded. "Not me. I'm your neighbor, Ellwynn Carpenter, Mr. Nord. I'm unarmed. I didn't have any part in what has happened. I just came up here, like you, to see what's going on."

Nord relaxed a little though it seemed easily possible that Carpenter was lying. Judging from what he had said only yesterday, if he wasn't actually a member of the violence group, he was one of them morally.

"That's better, Mr. Nord," Ellwynn Carpenter said, grinning feebly. "Thanks. You looked like a wild bull. Good. Down there in town—and I suppose in other places too—a few people aren't fleeing back to the sensipsych like sheep. They are showing that they've got latent courage."

"Sure," Nord growled. He could see that Carpenter was bursting to relieve his taut nerves in a talking jag, so he encouraged him, hoping to learn something.

"I used to wish it were possible for Earth to be invaded by monsters from another world—like in some of the old yarns," Carpenter continued. "It would unite people, strengthen them, give them the objective of survival to hope and struggle for. It couldn't happen—but maybe now something just as good has been brought about artificially.

"Men are still primitive and bloodthirsty inside—as shown from the fact that so many of them still go for detective and murder sequences, even via sensipsych. And witness how it was two hundred years back—with everybody shouting for peace and against war. That was fine—then—because peace was an ideal to *fight* for, not a stupendous stagnation."

Something of half-truth in what Carpenter said—something incomplete and stupid without its other half of moderation—irritated Anson Nord. "Shut up!" he snapped.

THE youth gulped under the sharp order. His cheeks paled in the dawn-light and his eyes grew big with too-quick fear. But as the seconds passed and Nord did not strike him he regained confidence. Panting and out of breath he began to talk again.

"You see, Nord," he said. "You *enjoy* hating my ideas—and me. It proves my point. You're a savage deep down, Nord. We're all savages. I've been a medical student—I should know.

"And do you want me to point out a paradox—that I'll bet you saw evidence of, during the last half-hour? That emotions that have always been considered the best in man, find their best expression in the presence of hate and violence?"

What Anson Nord saw now in Carpenter's talk was a young intentness on philosophical idea for the sake of the idea alone. It seemed a callow approach to him. It irritated his frayed nerves. It made him laugh.

"Look here, Ellwynn," he said. "I'm not disagreeing with you—in fact, in many ways I do agree—while still not buying any of the Hitler-like theories of the importance of hate and what goes with it.

"What I find myself trying to get at right now, is a quick picture of what is happening in the world—with the *practical* objective of doing something beneficial in mind instead of wasting time on chatter."

"I'll bite on bait like that, Nord," Carpenter answered quickly. "What happened in our suburb tonight happened just about everywhere—a great coordinated undertaking or revolt by a faction, organized and operating like any underground faction of centuries ago.

"*Mathais*, they call themselves. It could be a man or a meaning or just a code name. In theory they're not supposed to win anything for themselves.

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And they're hopelessly outnumbered. They're supposed to be so fed up with the way things have been that they are ready to accept their doom and kill and be killed to bring about a change. It could be just that. Or there might be some kind of power-politics hiding behind this idealistic front. Who knows?

"Then there's a bunch of armchair middle-of-the-roaders, without organization or power, who just pass out interesting handbills that sound very reasonable—though they offer no solution to anything.

"But looming over everything else is the organized status-quo of decadence and the sensipsych with the robot police behind it. George Schaeffer seems to be in that camp somewhere—unless he walks completely alone. He has at his command huge thought-machines that could digest statistics, figure trends, maybe even predict the next step of progress—if there is one.

"But does he give any explanation of what's in his mind about that—though that damned sensipsych is mostly his brainchild? He does not. So you can only pick out your sympathies with your heart. And your possible action—hoping that it will be beneficial. "You can't just use your head."

Ellwynn Carpenter was a physical coward but Nord felt a grudging respect for him now He had a keen intellect. But then Nord felt a cold twinge along his spine as it came to him that they were being as unwary as untutored babes in the woods.

"We *can* use our heads, Ellwynn," he remarked softly. "By realizing that here we've been standing for several minutes, within a few yards of an air-spaceship that may still be manned by people who know we're here, who can knock us off at any moment if we don't get out of sight."

In awkward haste they stumbled behind some massive rocks. Carpenter licked dry lips. Nord looked down over his suburb. The mass of trees, with houses peeping through, looked very peaceful. There were only a few rising curls of smoke.

The night that had seemed so terrible to its sheltered inhabitants revealed scant signs of damage at dawn. Nord was thinking that what had passed could have been infinitely worse—that it had been only a foretaste—maybe a warning. With much more to come.

A helicopter was sinking groundward on flickering blades. Probably it was bringing in more police robots. The fanatics must have died or been captured by tens. But a dozen men, properly equipped these days, could still create almost unimaginable havoc.

Something made Nord look eastward toward the city. A sliver of glowing orange peeped through the murk at the horizon. So far this was a normal spectacle, as old as the planets.

BUT then it seemed as if the sun rose all at once. And in an instant it became far huger and brighter than any Earthly sun. The tremendous bubble of flame expanded upward silently, the blues and violets in it meaning millions of degrees of heat.

High, high up a cloud formed, white and milling at its center, tawny farther out, fringed with black at its rim. As usual, tardy sound, even when pushed faster by a great shock-wave, lagged far behind the view.

Anson Nord saw little of it. His heart was in his mouth as he dragged Carpenter prone. They hid their eyes and their faces from speeding radiation.

The boy sucked air between his teeth and screamed till the breath in his lungs was gone. He gasped and screamed again. For minutes this went on. Then the roar of the explosion closed in from the distance and drowned out his voice, like the grinding and pounding of a million surfs. Now Nord stared at Carpenter, who still mouthed his screams as if in pantomime.

In another minute quiet came back though the cloud lingered on. At last Carpenter was spent from screaming. For awhile he lay inert, like a corpse. Then he began to weep.

"You see, Nord?" he sobbed. "You see how I acted? Yellow, empty! I'm a

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living cross-section of what civilization has become, Nord. And what can anybody answer? Let this kind of fury burn the cowardice out of cowards. Let them live through it if they can. Otherwise, let 'em die! The city was bombed, wasn't it? A hundred miles away."

The boy's terrible frankness made Anson Nord's mouth taste sourer. It was indecent. It had martyrdom in it. It was like raw entrails, spilled. Nord knew that they were partly his own—for partly he agreed.

"Yeah—the city," he said. "Especially the Ajax Tower, where they make the sensipsych sets—And the dreams. The Tower is what they'd most want to wipe out, isn't it?"

Nord's thoughts and feelings seemed to scramble in every direction. The many Harwell adventures he had lived, second-hand, until the members of that family seemed his dearest friends. At last report they had been on Earth—probably living in the Tower if they hadn't yet gone out to Jupiter. Bob, Clara and especially Joey—so often his make-believe son.

Nord's hide seemed to shrink around his flesh. He thought of much more than just the Harwells. Of his wife, who had left him. Of his empty useless house. It was futile to go back.

And the small air-and-space ship gleamed there so near to him, brooding, calling him like a phantom memory that had turned real. But he was afraid of it too. So what did that mean? An invitation to make a beginning—to try to conquer his fear.

Nord picked up a rock and hurled it. It bounced, clanging, from the flank of the ship. He waited for a minute. No crewmen rushed from its opened airlock. Maybe then it *was* deserted.

"Carpenter," he said, "you claim that harsh reality and danger will kill or cure us. So I'm going to fly to the city. Want to come along?"

He could see how the youth forced unwilling assent between his lips: "Yeah—yeah, sure! Let's go, Nord."

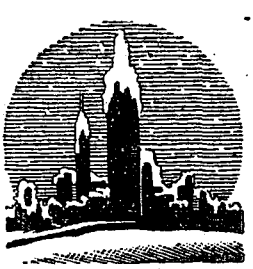
Anson Nord ambled forward. He picked up the Midas Touch pistols that had belonged to the youths he had battled, who still lay senseless on the ground. He flipped one pistol into Carpenter's uncertain hands, then rushed to the airlock.

CHAPTER VIII

Passenger

IT was soon evident that there was no one in the ship to contest their full possession. They made a quick tour of inspection—engine-room, chart-room, quarters, fuel. Gaunt meta gleamed around them, molded to precision and terrific power. Fashioned to reach even the once symbolically unattainable—the planets across space. Here again was the hidden utilitarian side of a civilization that on its visible surface had become as dainty as a painted pastel. [*Turn page*]

SECRETS OF THE TIME TO COME!



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And there was evidence of what the ship's recent crew had been like. There were obsolete physics textbooks. Students were often the fanatics, the drivers, the idealists, weren't they? So this that was happening in the world seemed in part a student movement. Such movements could be right or wrong or half right and half wrong. But the motive was usually good.

There were also some large, capsule-shaped objects, rough in construction, like homemade things but no doubt as effective as the bomb that Nord and Carpenter had just seen explode. Almost as easy to make nowadays as black powder had been two centuries before. Did one have to look further, to the glass vials full of cloudy liquids that could be sprayed from a speeding ship, spreading deadly plagues?

It was horrible how the whole aspect of life had changed in this last hour. The purpose was good, perhaps—but the means was terribly drastic. Overdrawn—probably beyond the realization of its advocates—in horror. And yet—Nord did not finish the thought.

Carpenter pointed to the word scribbled in red on the cover of a book—*Mathais*. To Nord it seemed the crudest sort of melodramatics. He felt bitter and confused again. "Come on, fella," he said. He led the way to the ship's controls.

"You can't fly it, Nord," Carpenter told him.

Nord's hands were trembling. But he had the memory of the hundreds of times that his dream-hands, following the sequence of a sensipsych recording of a Harwell adventure, had manipulated just such an array of controls with swift and absolute precision. Maybe the reflexes of such imaginary movements were now stamped in his brain.

"Remember that the sensipsych is also a training-device, Carpenter," Nord growled.

He was a little like his swashbuckling vision of Bob Harwell when he strapped himself in the pilot-seat and began to push buttons. But when the hum came and that soft powerful thrust that he knew so well in a dream, his insides seemed to curdle. He knew that all this was real, that he could kill himself and the youngster strapped beside him. He had to fight the desire to turn back—like an awkward child who has been taunted into climbing too high a tree.

Carpenter's face was pasty. His lips worked.

Now they were up in the glare of the sun, soaring on stubby wings. The ship screamed like a bullet while the sky darkened with altitude toward spatial blackness. A hundred-mile flight was a matter of a couple of minutes.

Once, in an artificially clarified atmosphere, the city had been white and beautiful with rich green fringes of vegetation. Now its expanse was veiled by a reddish murk of dust and vapors that looked like flames whose color had faded. And there was a great blackened sore with lecherous trails of smoke streaming up from it.

That same sore seemed to extend itself into Anson Nord's own soul and flesh. As if it were really in his stomach it made him retch with sickness. It would have been dreadful in any age—but to one who had had little occasion to see the color of desolation it was more than ghastly.

Nord's stimulated imagination raced on ahead of even the hurtling ship to the seared gardens and all the horror that distance still hid. So he landed the craft in a bemused state, by the artificial reflexes built into his mind itself and with little chance to be dangerously afraid of the task.

He brought the ship down close to what was left of the Ajax Tower—a blackened pile, one-third its former height, which looked like a snag-tooth. It was half melted to something like crude glass and it still radiated great heat and doubtless floods of radioactive emanations.

To protect himself from the latter Nord donned a spacesuit. That too was the duplication of a dream-act—done swiftly but, it seemed, with lagging slowness—like a thing accomplished in a nightmare, to save one's self or a

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friend from some awful fate.

Impressions were at once dreamily vague and rawly vivid. Nord saw Ellwynn Carpenter's face, pale as paper, its expression congealed, as if in catalepsy. The boy was too horrified even to scream. Thus he was no trouble.

"Stay here," Nord said, his voice sounding thready and far away even to himself inside the metal helmet of his armor. He slammed its face-plate, then worked the ship's airlock valves.

A SECOND later he was out in the hot murk and still-settling dust. He remembered how things had been—here. He saw what they were like now. Between the two there was a gap which no imagination could quite have bridged. No advocate of violence could have grasped beforehand what his arguments really meant when crystallized into fact.

This was part of what Anson Nord knew that he had to live with now. And there was his overpowering wave of compassion—which, it seemed, was, and had to be, the child of disaster. Crazy, wasn't it? Cockeyed! Why was life made so strangely?

He saw evidences of heroism—one blackened corpse lying over another, grasping it with its charred arms as if to shield it. When he saw that Nord loved the human race. It was worth saving.

For a few moments Nord saw no living movement. Then something stirred. It lay under ashes in the same way that, on beaches, people sometimes bury themselves in sand. The crust of ash cracked more, revealing more definitely the armored shape of a man. The legs were crushed. The masonry, lying near, must have fallen on them.

Nord scraped the ash away from the face-plate of the dying man's radiation-armor. Nord heard his voice through his own helmet-radio. "Sure—I belong with *Mathais.* But I didn't know it would be like this." It was like a plea for forgiveness on the basis of ignorance.

"Do you know what happened to Bob Harwell and his wife and boy?" Nord heard himself demanding. "You know who I mean. They must have been here."

The man did not answer. He was finished.

But in a few seconds another voice whispered: "I know Harwell, damn him! Just before the bomb blast he and his woman and brat were about to blow for Jupiter. I'll bet they were tipped off by the *Mathais* bunch—being friends of theirs. Don't know whether they got away or not though. Most of the other actor people were wiped out."

Nord looked around, at first seeing nothing but a figure in a frog costume, part of which was miraculously uncharred, lying beside a wilted flowerbed. But the man was dead.

Then Nord saw another figure, staggering toward him through the murk. He was small and plump and he was lucky enough to be wearing radiation armor—Nord did not then know that he was of the kind that was most likely to look out for his own safety first. His lips drooled with terror.

And now he was whining, "If you belong with *Mathais,* I surrender. Just get me out of here—anywhere! *Anywhere,* I say! Harwell wasn't the hero that some people think. Get me out of here!"

The little plump man began to cry. He crumpled to the ground, sobbing. Nord didn't know that he was Burris, Chief of Histrionics for Ajax, and didn't care. He picked the man up gently and lugged him back to the ship. In the airlock compartment, Nord removed the fellow's radiation-tainted armor, and his own, thrust both into the decontamination chest, where neutralizing forces would rid them of radioactivity.

Nord dumped the man onto a bunk and brought him a sleep capsule from the medical stores.

Then Nord made his way to the controls of the ship. Beside them was the calculator-mechanism. He punched buttons to figure out a course. He was even a little angry at the machine because it did what he could not do. But that was

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only an overtone of his other emotions. He was thinking that he had no wife, no home, that his world was broken to shards. And a great lump was in his throat now that he knew that the Harwells, whom he had come to rescue, might well be dead.

Maybe this last thought was now the strongest drive in him. Maybe he still meant to follow the trail of possible rescue. Maybe also he wanted to escape from the dreadful oppressing scene around him. But Bob Harwell had been his hero—subconsciously his attitude toward him was a little like a small boy's worship.

Now he had a perfect chance to emulate him. Nord's head wasn't too clear after all that had happened. Besides, he still had that urge to conquer his fear. Circumstances were just r i g h t to prompt him to make a wild and perhaps utterly foolish move.

Ellwynn Carpenter came to stare at what he was doing. And grimly Nord said, "This is your idea as much as mine, Ellwynn. To you fear is what separates the softened race of man from what it ought to be.

"If I do a little of the *actual* space-traveling I've always wanted to do but was afraid to do—and lick the scare in me—it'll be more than a personal victory, won't it? Because it's licking part of the problem of the whole world!"

Carpenter only gasped raggedly as Nord set the robot-pilot according to the data which the calculator had produced.

"It seems that the sensipsych taught me all I have to know about running a space-ship," Nord went on. "I noticed before that there was plenty of food aboard. And spare filters for the air-purifiers. Atomic fuel, being so compact in proportion to its power content, needs hardly to be considered. We have more than we'll need. We're going out to Jupiter and its moons, Carpenter."

Ellwynn Carpenter didn't protest—maybe because his throat cleaved together, making him speechless—maybe he was still driving himself toward the fear-cure of danger too.

Nord hardly thought just then of the man he had picked up. Anyway, where was there to take him if they didn't carry him along? When all Earth was in chaos—with more to come?

"I'll strap down our passenger for the takeoff," Nord said further. "You do likewise for yourself."

When Nord turned the key which gave the robot-pilot full charge of everything he still had five minutes to strap himself to a bunk.

THE leap into space began with the usual crushing sense of thrust—much harsher in reality than in a toned-down sensipsych dream. As if by magic the smoldering ruins of the city were gone beyond the window ports. White clouds flashed past. The sky changed to slaty black, dotted with bright points of light and smeared with the chalk-dust of stars too distant to be seen individually.

Cold grubs began to crawl in Anson Nord's brain as realization took its toll. This was an actual takeoff into space, not a feathery fake. Without protection from the vacuum one's blood could *really* boil away out here. And at a velocity of many miles per second there was no easy turning back. Reversing the shell of a Twentieth Century naval gun in flight would have been simpler.

Moreover, though theoretically this ship was capable of extended journeys in space, still it was not of the kind usually employed for long-range flights. And no one yet had gone farther than Jupiter. Nord began to grasp some dim and awing conception of how immense a distance even a million miles was. And that was nothing. He began to wonder if he had thrown away eternity.

But his panic did not reach full force until the robot-pilot cut off the drive-jets once the necessary velocity had been attained to make that tremendous leap out to the Jovian system. Then there was a sense of weightlessness, of free-fall. Yes, it felt exactly like falling. And what, to the instincts of man, is more terrifying?

This small ship did not rotate like a

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shell along its longitudinal axis as the great space-liners did, producing in the rooms with their floors toward the outer skin an artificial gravity by centrifugal force.

The feeling of free-fall was many times more intense than that which was ever allowed to intrude into a sensipsych vision. And now, for Nord and Carpenter, it was the beginning of all the terrible confusions to which the uninitiated are heirs in space.

There was that terrible sense of unbridgeable separation from everything familiar. And the pounding nostalgia of remembering friends and gentler scenes. Flowers, trees and other things that all Earth-life is conditioned to and made for.

Besides, Nord felt the beginnings of simpler physical disorder in his stomach—space vertigo. And he thought it strange—science could give you perfect emasculating shelter. Yet it could give you environments that you were never meant to endure even when you were toughened. This was another crazy paradox.

A moment later, as his ills dug deeper into Nord, such heavy thinking was stopped dead in him by growing strain. He *knew* that in a little while being out here with reality would drive him mad—that he had lost the battle he most wanted to win—against the softness he despised.

With Ellwynn Carpenter, who had been far more intense than he about the revolt, it was worse. The boy hadn't said a word since before the takeoff. But now he began to scream again.

Nord's lunge at him was automatic. He had begun rather to like the kid although he was aware of the instability of his emotions, of the possibility of his treachery—he might even be a *Mathais* henchman though he denied it.

Nord grasped Carpenter, cuffed him, shook him. It all seemed nightmare action—a phantom of the mind that had no substance. And then he began to wish that being out here were untrue like that. In that wish he stumbled on a prompting that could be salvation.

"Listen, fool!" he yelled. "This is all a dream! Try to believe that! Like the sensipsych visions it's phony! Keep telling yourself that's true till you understand. It's the only way now."

Carpenter stopped shrieking, affected some, no doubt, by the cuffs and the shaking from Nord. But then Nord saw the dullness coming into the boy's eyes. The trick was working. Nord felt it working in himself too. A vagueness was taking place of the sharp understanding in his mind that he was here.

Though of course he still knew that he was in space, yet the jagged edge of full realization was lost. It was something old, a device with which the brain of man has often throughout history sheltered itself in times of extreme strain.

It was as natural as the protecting scab which forms over a physical wound. It left some of his mind free for soothing memories. His roses—occasional poker games with Dave Clinton and other neighbors—Margaret, as she had been . . .

"We'll be all right, fella," he told Ellwynn Carpenter, trying to be optimistic. "We'll adjust. I've an idea that fundamentally people are just about as rugged as they ever were. As worth while and as worthless . . ."

In another few moments they were doing battle with their passenger, who, in spite of a sleep drug and the awful weariness and shock of the disaster he had been through, had now been startled back to a vague consciousness. His small eyes fairly left their sockets as he began to understand where he was.

"*Fiends!* Dirty *kidnappers!*" he screamed. "This is—*space!* Take me back! Oh, please—take me *back!* Everybody knows me—Burris of Ajax!" He shrieked and laughed and sobbed. He gasped for air as children used to do when they had whooping cough—when children's diseases still existed.

Nord and Carpenter didn't know him. They shrugged. They strapped him down in such a way that he could not release himself again. Carpenter's unsteady hand was gentle as he used the

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hypodermic needle that would once more bring the stranger peace.

Burris cried himself to sleep. In addition to his terror he, who had felt so big on Earth, here felt as insignificant as a creeping rodent. He even began to suspect that he had always been like that. But his ego rebelled. He hated everybody. Besides, he was going to die. D-I-E—the word that had been fading from the dictionary.

CHAPTER IX

The Dust Hole

DURING the hours and days that followed things were not as Nord had hoped. Throughout the period of the space sickness, his and Carpenter's minds seemed to become smeared blurs of semi-delirium. But somehow, in retching vertigo, they often found that ancient savior of human souls in distress—humor. They laughed at themselves, at each other, at their plight. Usually, though, the humor was tainted with wildness.

"You look silly, Nord! Green . . ."

"Nuts to you, kid. Where's the mirror? If you saw yourself you'd heave again. But what can you expect at hundreds of miles per second velocity—not that it should make any difference."

"The voyage to nowhere, Nord. Jupiter—the moons of Jupiter—what in hell do we want there? We don't belong there! Your idea, Nord. Damn your ideas!"

"Don't blame me, Ellwynn—you started the whole thing. You preached about fear and strength. It's your fault, Ellwynn. The joke's on you."

It was a banter that sounded crazy and drunken. But how many times in the middle of it did Anson Nord wish that there was a sensipsych set aboard with self-contained recordings. They were now out of range of Earthly broadcast centers. How many times did he yearn desperately to crawl into the sheltering hole represented by some pretty dream—not of space now certainly? For that was what he most wanted to escape.

Some vision of flowers and trees and summer clouds and placid streams would have served best. Something very Earthly. Even to be Mickey Mouse, eyeing ruefully a hugely swollen black toe, stubbed in some whimsical misadventure—a toe which nevertheless did not hurt but only tingled and tickled in a manner that made one want to laugh—would have been fine. But a space-vision? *Never!*

With such an attitude how easy it was to understand the defensive reaction of sensipsych fans on Earth to the progress of events. Nord and Carpenter, crossing the radio-news beam to Mars, were able to pick up reports.

Detroit, Chicago, San Francisco and London had been bombed—with all that amounting to little more than a foretaste or a promise of what *could* happen. If the *Mathais* bunch, striking from their hiding places, really let go with a general attack which they might do at any moment . . .

How easy then was it to believe the report that countless millions of dreamers had only fallen deeper into the decadent web of the sensipsych, seeking to hide the approach of death from their softened souls? At least they could hold onto beauty a little longer—even if they knew that they were ostriches, hiding their heads in sand.

A reproduction of George Schaeffer's voice was broadcast on the newsbeam too—following an announcement of his identity.

"I will keep making the same appeal," he said softly. "Go back to the sensipsych, everybody. It is best. Let the robot police do their work. The roving bands of vandals are rapidly being destroyed or rounded up. Go back. Rest."

Hearing this Ellwynn Carpenter's frazzled nerves gave way again. He wept. But his tears were of bitter fury. "Damn Schaeffer!" he sobbed. "Traitor to his kind—or fool—or dirty crook, even!"

Nord shared much of this view. But

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his bitterness extended farther. It covered all struggling factions, all forces that, with good or bad motives, still were tearing his Earth apart and promising its destruction.

Out here in space, hurtling on a journey that seemed more and more foolhardy, more and more only a useless suicide, Anson Nord found that he loved his Earth and his people more than he had believed.

More than ever he wanted his race to have a future that was better than the soft years he had known, one certainly better than the present confusion that could make an end to everything.

Part of the news he liked. Everywhere small groups of more rugged citizens had been formed to defend their lives and property. Armed with what weapons came to hand they called themselves Minute Men.

And once Nord picked up another voice, coming from another source. It sounded scratchy and mechanical. "This is *Mathais* speaking," it said. "Minute Men, we salute and honor you. You represent the degree of success we have attained. You are the reborn human courage we are sacrificing ourselves to bring back.

"That we are vastly outnumbered by the robot police, that our ranks are being thinned rapidly—that those captured are having their minds changed so that they remember nothing of their former selves—does not matter. We expected doom but perhaps it is worth the effort. Let more dreamers join the Minute Men!

"Do not think that you are safe, worms, because the robot police are winning superficially! It is a peculiarity of the science of this modern age, that even a handful of determined men, equipped with modern weapons—against which there is yet no effective defense—could wipe every trace of life from the face of the Earth!

"And *Mathais* will have that much strength to the ultimate moment. We could even destroy the Earth itself! Remember that, dreamers! Leave your foolish phantoms, show your strength and save yourselves. Leave behind the Tarzans and other heroes that you could never be in reality. Face richer fact! For soon you will be given a last chance. That is all."

THE transmission was scratchy and wavering as if taken from the midst of an old battle. Aided by the memory of certain warlike sensipsych adventures Nord did not find it difficult to picture in his imagination the source of this message. Some flame-lit night scene—a radio hookup in constant danger of breakdown under attack or wave-jamming from an enemy source. Though radio-beams were harder to find and jam.

And the voice of *Mathais* was evidently being beamed to Mars too, in addition to a certainty of its Terrestrial broadcast. A man's head, poised before a microphone. Almost, Nord could imagine the shape of his head. A leader—a fanatic, wild and perhaps cruel—*Mathais*.

Even with his clouded mind Nord could conjure up that much in his fancy. It had to be something like the true picture.

But there had been more to read in that scratchy voice. The harassment of a failing purpose and a grimness—maybe even something mad. What might that lead to in the end? A chill crawled through Nord's blood.

Yet what came over the radio was only a part of the trials that Anson Nord and Ellwynn Carpenter experienced. Space-sickness and awful nostalgia hammered at them. The former abated somewhat but the latter grew worse as their distance from home and all that they were familiar with became more extended.

Not that it was a constant cause for panic any more—rather, it was a slow grinding force that, it seemed, must blot out their lives in the end. Because their minds could not long live with such strangeness.

And there was Burris. It was inconceivable to keep him strapped to his bunk all the time. For hours at a

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stretch he could be fairly passive—dazed. But let loose, one never knew when he would try to sneak to the controls and attempt to turn the ship back toward Earth.

Twice he tried it and was stopped only by Nord's flying tackles, easy in the weightlessness. Then Carpenter would have to bring his hypodermic. If Burris ever succeeded in monkeying with the controls, the least that might be expected would be a dangerous deflection from course.

Even with the help of the calculators this might be impossible to correct. As a result the ship would go skittering, lost amidst frictionless space, perhaps to hurtle out toward the stars, never to return.

Or, if Burris chanced to open the throttle, they might all perish in the explosion of overcharged rocket-tubes.

Burris was like a terror-stricken and cunning child whom you could never trust. Sometimes he pleaded to be taken home. At other times he flung insults and accusations at Nord and Carpenter for hours on end.

"I'll get you! The law will get you! You're stupid barbarians—sadists—worse than Schaeffer. Did you know that Harwell was in cahoots with Schaeffer? Trying to pull some damned mischief!

"I know that Harwell went to see Schaffer in his underground lab the evening before the Ajax Tower was blown up. Of course Schaeffer is still perfectly safe in such a multiple-shielded retreat. Your precious Harwell family, Nord! Nice friends you got!"

Of course Nord had Burris' number. He was a petty louse—his raving wasn't worth listening to. But often the endlessness of it ground into Nord until he longed to batter Burris into insensibility and silence with his fists.

While loose, the little ex-Chief of Histrionics had to be watched constantly, like a bonfire in the middle of a gasoline dump centuries before. He was a constant nerve-straining menace. For his own sanity, it was best to keep him drugged and strapped down.

Plunging outward toward Jupiter the ship bypassed Mars at a quite short distance astronomically speaking—just a few million miles. It was a great ruddy star that showed almost a visible disc.

More days went by. News reports from Earth remained of the same character as before though the voices speaking on the Martian beam, which penetrated far beyond the planet itself, grew dimmer with increasing distance.

At last the ship was passing over the Asteroid Belt. As Nord looked at the scattered specks of light that were the planetoids which composed it he thought of a Harwell adventure that had been recorded there, one that he had experienced.

The planetoids were great airless chunks of rock—fragments of a world that had exploded fifty million years ago. A world the size of Mars. A few chunks of carven rock, and bits of intricately wrought metal, hinting at a highly advanced science among the now-dead inhabitants, had been discovered out there and brought back to Earth.

Even some charred and dried fragments of strange bodies and fernlike vegetation had been found. And bits of pictures glazed on shards of bright-colored porcelain. It must have been a beautiful world once. But in the fury of its explosion its culture had been wiped out so completely that even the sketchiest outline of its history was hard to trace.

Nord tried to imagine what its last days, what the final living moment of its inhabitants, had been like.

Ellwynn Carpenter spoke at his shoulder. "The blast could have been natural—the result of atomic forces gathering at its core. But what if it weren't natural? What if it came about by a situation almost duplicating that which exists on Earth, today?"

Carpenter's voice was almost shrill. Nord didn't answer. He was cold all over. The blowup of a world—no catastrophe save a nova could match that. It was beyond conception. The ground beneath you, eruping in flame to throw you into the sky.

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It was hours before he could find a little peace in sleep.

SO the journey continued. Now in greater emptiness, now in complete radio-silence. There was no more news. There was only that steady imperceptible rushing on. More and more Nord felt how thin were his reasons for starting out.

Impulse, backed up by some old-time psychiatrist's advice to the timid—"Do what you are afraid to do." And of course the wish to find the Harwells, who, if they had left the Ajax Tower in time to escape death in the bombing and had actually made their way out to their destination, would not need help anyway.

But if they were nowhere to be found, what then? That would mean silence and futility, time and pain wasted, a perilous journey back that they might never complete. Nord and Carpenter laughed about their journey to nowhere—but time and again they came near to blaming each other, seriously and with fury, for the starting of it.

At last Jupiter, by far the largest of all the planets, was swelling as a visible disc, surrounded by its retinue of moons.

Burris, in a calmer moment, offered Nord some information, his eyes, grown hollow, shining malevolently from the shadows over his bunk. "I know where Harwell meant to make his first landing. It's in the Ajax records. Not on Jupiter but on Ganymede, the largest satellite—in a desert valley, away from everything.

"He wanted to look at something, there. It means something to him and Schaeffer, who are trying to save their rotten empire of dreams. Then he'll go on. I'll give you the exact position of the valley if you're so interested in finding that bum. Maybe I can settle a score with him."

Nord still took little stock in Burris' accusations. But he was more than ever aware of mysteries, dimly hinted at through the smokes of chaos that had enwrapped humanity.

Nord worked the calculator again, reset the robot pilot a little. Soon afterward the ship was braking speed, its prow enveloped in forward-jetting incandescence. It came down on Ganymede in the middle of that fabulous valley.

Wearing space-armor the three men stepped forth, Nord and Carpenter keeping Burris between them. It was early morning here. The frost on the rocky ground was not of water—it was part of the thin atmosphere which had congealed during the fearfully cold night.

Nitrogen, carbon-dioxide, methane—threads of white vapor, rising under the feeble warmth of the far-off sun, coiled around their weird attire and made a thin stratified layer of fog at knee level. Through it loomed great metal piers that must have supported something massive—something that must have been removed, since it could not otherwise have vanished without a trace.

And there were tracks in the dusty soil—like the prints of caterpillar treads. Here, on an all-but-dead world with little weather, they could have lasted for centuries—but no more. The evidence of some great migration was plain to see.

From the dust, full of broken crystal shards, Carpenter picked up what may have been a piece of petrified wood—relic of a time when Jupiter, looming gigantic on the horizon, had radiated heat, almost like the sun, to a system of living moons.

Carpenter tossed the fragment away disgustedly. But by then Nord had picked up something else—wires woven inside crystal. "It looks a little like the theon-grid of an XD-ten set," he said.

Neither Nord nor Carpenter mentioned that there was no ship other than their own in sight. This absence seemed to give a negative answer to the purpose of their journey. That the Harwells hadn't come—that they must have perished in the Ajax Tower. A lump formed in Nord's throat. Though space had far less charm for him than before, still, via sensipsych, the Harwells were

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his friends, Joey was his son, Bob his legendary self.

And what was his and Carpenter's position now? Here they were on a frozen near-dead world, where there was no colonial dome-city, where no explorers had lingered. The deserted remains of the past loomed starkly through the fog of melting atmosphere, mocking their presence in the tomblike silence. Truly theirs had been a voyage with vast suffering to nowhere—nowhere men could ever belong.

Burris began to scream and laugh again—through his helmet radio. "Harwell is finished! *Good!* He never came. And what is there left for us to do here but die?"

NORD and Carpenter gripped him tight. Nord wondered why he did not feel like screaming himself, here in this deadly desolation, where it seemed that no man could stay and keep his sanity. He did not know that hard satisfaction had come unbidden inside him, matched his hard smile. Somehow being here *did* please him in spite of everything. And then he understood.

Carpenter and he exchanged glances past the quivering Burris. "Yeah, I know, Nord," Carpenter said slowly and he didn't sound like a scared kid anymore. "It was a long hard pull. It wasn't a trip to nowhere after all—but the most important move in our lives. We've come through fear to courage, Nord. We really have.

"And it's freedom too—freedom to see strangeness and be intrigued by it, not crushed inside. And just by coming so far I don't feel as if I've only piled up a useless heap of dirt, as you once said, either. It's much better than looking down from a mountain."

Nord laughed gleefully. He knew that Carpenter and he were friends.

Then, as they walked forward, still exploring, they saw in the dust the ruts left by the landing wheels of an Earthly ship. They saw a few empty food containers. The footprints were the clincher—space-boot prints in three sizes. And the boy's weren't the smallest. You could tell. A boy's spoor is apt to have a certain coltish verve. The woman's prints were more sedate, the man's were bold. The Harwells then had come and gone. They were alive.

Joyfully Nord hurried ahead, back to the ship, to peer through a telescope. Near the center of the vast grey-streaked bulk of Jupiter he found a tiny spark of incandescence. He photographed it through the scope to be sure of its position.

"Rocket flashes," he told Carpenter a moment later. "From the Harwell ship, doubtless. It won't take us long to get where they've gone."

His optimism died away weakly at the end. He was chillingly aware that his younger companion and he would need all of their new-found courage—which still might well be useless.

For something had gone wrong.

Carpenter knew it too. His features were grave behind his face-plate. And Burris' eyes seemed as large as saucers. "Someone's been here while we were—outside," Nord croaked. "Someone or something."

"Yeah," Carpenter said softly. His voice was like a rustle from a dead past here on this deserted world.

Nord had opened his face-plate so that he might peer into the telescope. So he was breathing the air inside the ship. Through his excitement he now realized that it was thinner than it should be. His lungs labored in it. As if someone had allowed much of it to escape. As if somehow the airlock valves had been tampered with.

But this was not the only eviden[ce]. The calculator mechanism, used to [plot] interplanetary trajectories had b[een] partly disassembled. Its intricate i[n]nards were bared and some of them, completely detached, were laid out in careful rows on the floor.

The same was true of the ship's controls.

Nord moved forward and touched a lever. It was limp in his hand—detached from the devices it was supposed to move.

"The ship won't fly the way it is

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now," Nord said dully. "We're stranded here."

"I wonder why all this was done?" Carpenter asked.

Nord shrugged. "Either to keep us here," he answered. "Or—because of some alien curiosity to find out how Earth-made devices work."

Nord moved toward the locker where he had put the Midas Touch pistols. But they were gone. Burris made a whining noise of fear.

Carpenter said softly, "Shut up—*listen!*"

From deeper in the vitals of the ship came a rattling—as of a large rat scrambling in some hidden nook. Nord's flesh crawled and he gripped a detached lever to use as a club. But the noise ceased abruptly.

His gaze wandered to one of the stern ports. Beyond the thick glass he could see the track which the landing wheels of the ship had left in the dusty ground. In one place the tread mark of a great tire was broken. And there was a round hole left in the dust—like a tiny crater.

"Look," Nord said.

The hole in the tire-mark gave him a hint of what had happened. He thought of all the things that must be buried here—discarded and lying under the dust—as in any ancient and deserted city. Broken glass, art objects, bits of metal, even complete machines.

His mind leaped quickly at the only possible explanation for what was happening now. "In landing, we ran over something that was shallowly buried," he said. "Maybe an inert machine. The pressure of the ship's weight did something to awaken it. It emerged. That's not as crazy as it sounds."

CHAPTER X

Ovoid of Ganymede

THEY were up against the nameless —some residual fragment of a great civilization here on this frozen moon. Being aware of its presence was like being aware of the presence of a ghost in a vast and magnificent tomb. It made the blood pound, the cold sweat ooze. In it were all the scrambling fears of the unknown.

"Try to radio Bob Harwell!" Burris shrilled. "Maybe he can rescue us!"

"Shut up!" Carpenter snapped again.

In his fear Burris did not take into account his frequent vindictive comments about Bob Harwell. The shallow weakness in him grabbed only at safety, wherever he thought it might be.

Nord stared at the radio, which, like the controls and the calculator, had been partially disassembled and was now unworkable.

Nord's sense of being trapped aroused wild impulses in him. He wanted to run out into this cold desert world, to escape from the menace that was here. But to do that could mean only slow death by suffocation, perhaps by madness in the stillness and the cold. The only sensible thing to do was to stand his ground and try to work things out. He gripped the lever tighter.

"Find some kind of club, Carpenter," he growled. "There—unscrew one of those stanchion-posts—it's better than nothing. Then we can try to rout the thing out and beat it down before it can do more damage."

A moment later they were removing food containers and other supplies from a storage-compartment—whence the rattling sounds apparently had come. Their feverish activity was like trying to dig out a hidden rat or, better, a poisonous and deadly reptile. But even this was a feeble simile.

Again there was a rattle as the thing seemed to crowd back into deeper concealment. Once Nord and Carpenter saw a flicker of darting movement, the sheen of a surface, opalescent and metallic. Nord swung at it with his lever but missed. His weapon hit a stack of dehydrated-soup containers and they came clattering down.

The thing was completely out of sight again. But it could not remain so for long. Driven by panic, the sole impulse

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that possessed Nord and Carpenter was to dig out a danger and bring it to an end so that their frayed nerves could relax. They were like a pair of yelping dogs as they tore at the stuff piled in that compartment to clear their way to the eerie intruder.

They accomplished this at last. For a breathless moment they stood face to face with the unknown while Burris whimpered in the background. The thing did not move now, for there was no place for it to go. It was ovoid and metallic, not over fifteen inches across in its greatest diameter.

Like metal tatters tentacles dangled from it, some terminating in tiny wrenchlike claws, others in lesser tentacles as fine as wire, as fine as hair. And there was a pair of eyes. They looked like microscope eyepieces and were apparently movable, being mounted on universal joints.

There was an almost living glitter in the lenses of those eyes. The little monster was motionless but you could sense its taut and aware alertness.

As if by mutual agreement Nord raised his lever and Carpenter raised his stanchion post. They struck together —or, at least that was their intention. They might have known better. Swift motion was met by slight but far swifter motion.

Somewhere in mid-arc, swinging downward, the metal clubs of both men were each gripped by a wirelike tentacle. There was a blue flash. It seemed not only visual but also to explode in the brains of the two men. It was like a blow. Carpenter and Nord went down on the floor-plating, half stunned.

Vaguely Nord saw the thing bound over him, propelled perhaps by the minute streamer of fire that flashed from it. Or perhaps anti-gravity was involved somewhere. Burris gave a choked and piteous scream—then he too was down, writhing.

But there was no pause in the ovoid's swift movement, which still was erratic. It was as if the thing, which must be centuries old and had lain for so long under the dust, lacked its full powers. It skipped and hopped like a grasshopper which lacks one of its rear legs. In its flank there was a great dent and many of its metal tendrils trailed uselessly.

It came back to Nord, alighting on his chest. He could not fight against it now, for his nerves were still stunned with shock. He could only stare at the little monster in revulsion as it worked over him with terrific speed.

Tendrils groped inside his helmet through the open face-window, reached around to the back of his neck. There wirelike tentacle-tips burrowed into his flesh, past his vertebrae, seemed to reached his spinal cord. There was a single darting burst of pain then complete paralysis.

In swift succession Carpenter and Burris were subjected to the same treatment. All three lay dazed and helpless. When this was accomplished the ovoid seemed to relax a little. It crept from one man to the next in a continuous triangle, pausing beside each for a brief moment. The circuit was repeated dozens of times.

NORD was in a dreamlike state, realized that his companions must be in similar condition. Impressions came to him like parts of dreams. No words were used, either mental or audible, but his mind began to find words for those impressions—eagerness, questioning, relief at freedom after having been imprisoned in dust for a very long time—discarded, useless, helpless. And more questioning.

What are you? Where do you come from? How dangerous are you? No—they were not questions but questions —pure ideas. Nord knew that his mind was being dug into and explored by this eerie mechanical thing.

There was savagery here—savagery that could kill him and Carpenter in an instant. But there was also a kind of yearning—it was curiously like a maternal instinct that seeks the right type of object for its attentions, its care-taking.

And there were scores of other visionary fantasies swimming in his mind. No

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—not fantasies but history. Looming towers, perfumed gardens. Slender beings, not too far from human in form, moved around in those gardens. They thought of poetry and music and beauty. They were from long long ago. Their glory was sublime. One could yearn for such glory.

The scene of the visions shifted to more recent history. The coming of Earth-ships. He could even read the numerals and letters of the classification numbers painted on their prows. Buried in the dust, this thing had still been able to see though it was powerless to move. Some super-development of radar must be one of its senses.

These ships were those of the first exploring parties from Earth that had ever landed on Ganymede.

Then in his mind Nord saw the Harwell craft. And he saw Bob and Clara and Joey, moving about in their space armor. He even overheard fragments of their conversation.

Joey saying, as they looked at the deserted remains of past greatness about them, "Yep, Pop—the Ganymedeans moved out of Ganymede all right. But they were big stuff—big enough maybe to be past the stage of dead-ends. I hope so, anyhow."

And Nord's dimmed mind wondered if here it grasped the principal reason for Bob Harwell's coming out Jupiter way.

His consciousness for awhile was febrile and confused. He heard Carpenter's ragged breathing near him. And then, some moments after these visionary experiences that were were a little [illegible] those of the sensipsych ceased, after the litle ovoid ceased its continuous creeping from man to man and crouched to one side, regarding them all intently, he heard Burris begin again to rave.

The raving was that of a weak and fear-stricken man, seeking scapegoats —anybody but himself—to blame for his misfortunes. "Damn you fools!" he yelled. "If you wanted to come here looking for those crazy crooked Harwells, why did you have to drag me into it?

"I'd like to see you both in hell for bringing me here. I'd like a lot more to see Bob Harwell punished. Him and his whole family! Things were all right until he started to shoot off his mouth. Until he—he insulted me! Until—"

Burris' voice broke into wild sobbing. Carpenter swore at him. Nord tried to crawl toward him, bent on mindless violence. But his muscles were held impotent by paralysis. Only his voice and lungs still were painfully under his control.

"Keep still, you childish imbecile!" he mumbled.

But the strangest thing that happened was the ovoid's reaction to Burris' hysterical invective. It approached him daintily and with a kind of inquisitive eagerness, like some great insect. Delicately and with seeming gentleness its metal tendrils groped again inside his oxygen helmet by way of his open faceplate.

At first his cries of terror were shrill rasping screams. But then he began to relax. The screams subsided to sleepy moans, which then seemed to become contented murmurings. These gave way to the regular snores of sleep.

From all this Nord, whose mind was clearer now, received an odd impression. There was something here that was exactly like a fretting baby being lulled and coddled to sleep by its mother.

But when the mechanical ovoid had finished ministering to Burris its attitude toward Nord and Carpenter became subtly opposite in nature. It crouched beside Burris and seemed to glare at them with an unholy vindictiveness in its eye-lenses.

Nord began to sweat with panic. For a second he was sure that, in compliance with some will toward murder on Burris' part, the little monster would lunge at Carpenter and himself, would make a fiery end of them both.

But at last some balancing force seemed to check this devilish impulse in the ovoid's mechanical intellect. Its glare faded. Carpenter's sigh of relief was ragged.

"Gosh!" he breathed. "Did you see

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that? Burris seems to have made a hit with this thing. What goes on here anyway?"

"I don't quite know yet," Nord growled. "Let's not talk too much. It might draw unpleasant attention to us."

AS if to confirm Nord's worry the ovoid's eye-lenses swung on them again balefully. But after a moment it became occupied with itself like a cat preening its fur.

The mechanical thing began to work on its own form with its tiny wrench-like claws, repairing the damage that had been wrought beneath the dust for centuries. It labored with incredible darting speed, opening the plating of its metal integument, making fine adjustments within. More of its limp tendrils came to life to help with the work.

Again Nord saw the dent in its side—the result, probably, of its having been run over by the spaceship wheel—the accident which had allowed power to circulate again, perhaps by a short-circuiting around a switch, through the myriad mechanisms of its form, permitting it to be active once more.

And the ovoid seemed to know just what it wanted to do—at least it toiled with no single moment of hesitation. Its first intense curiosity over alien Earth-science and the nature of these terrestrial visitors seemed at an end.

It finished its task quickly and then, moving with an improved coordination, it investigated the slumbering Burris gently. Nord and Carpenter closed their eyes and feigned unconsciousness as it investigated them, too, touching their faces with its cold tendrils.

A moment later it was at the airlock. The two men did not risk looking at it but they could hear the sounds of its metal tentacles grating softly against metal. Nord was thinking that, with its tiny grasping organs, some of them finer than hair, it could grope like a key into the vitals of a lock until no ordinary doors could stop it.

They heard the working of the airlock valves. Then there was silence. The little monster was gone temporarily. But Nord and Carpenter both knew that this did not mean anything.

They waited for a brief while to be sure the ovoid would not come back immediately. Carpenter spoke first. "What's it up to?" he growled. "What happens now?"

Minutes earlier Nord had begun to sense that his young friend and Burris and himself had been caught up helplessly in some strange eddy-current of a great learning, the bulk of which had vanished from Ganymede.

Here it was functioning again, in a sort of corrupt form—perhaps odder than, for instance, the adoption of young rats by a kittenless mother-cat. His mind itself seemed to twist, in a wry grimace at the idea, not quite able to follow it through.

"What's up?" Nord echoed softly. "Something we could lose our necks over very easily. But we'll have to wait and see just what it is. Can you move at all?"

"My fingers—a little," Carpenter replied.

Nord found that this was also true of himself. The paralysis was wearing off slightly. He felt a little flash of hope. He was less like a caterpillar rendered impotent by the sting of a wasp.

"Try hard to get control of your muscles," he said. "And *keep* trying. Though," he added, "it probably won't do any good."

"Probably not," Carpenter agreed. "This robot thing is smart. I'm sure that it wouldn't take any serious risks. It must know just how long the paralysis will keep us from making any effective move. Still, we've got to try."

While Burris continued to snore [illegible] cously the two men fought to regain mastery of their muscles. Like crayfish numbed with cold they at last managed to creep tediously across the deck-plating until they were beneath a pair of circular windows.

By then Nord had noticed something. On a small ledge above a locker, well out of their easy reach, the ovoid had placed the two Midas Touch pistols. Stiffly he pointed toward them and Car-

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penter managed to nod.

It was a tantalizing situation that provoked both optimism and excitement.

"Forget about it," Carpenter croaked. "As far as we're concerned those pistols might as well be back on Earth. In our present condition we could neither reach them nor knock them down."

Nord, panting from the effort of creeping, sighed heavily and returned his attention to the difficult task of dragging himself erect so that he could peer out of the window. On Earth this would have now been impossible but the Ganymedean gravity was much feebler. Clutching at plastic handholds on the wall he managed it. So did Carpenter.

Out in that pale alien morning the stratified mists of evaporating frost still coiled sluggishly around the metal piers, their whiteness contrasting with the near-blackness of the sky. Once Ganymede had been verdant. Then, near death from senility, technology had made it habitable. But now it was being allowed truly to die.

Its landscape was utterly dreary and frigid. The silence within the ship was ponderous. Nord could hear the rustle of pulses in his head as his eyes searched for the small metal monster.

A hundred yards away he saw dust and pebbles jetting upward in small bursts—as soil does when a burrowing hound, already out of sight, digs for a rabbit. In that tenuous air the dust did not even make drifting puffs but fell at once to the ground, just as did the heavier material. The thin atmosphere offered it no support.

"It must be our small ancient captor, excavating for something." Carpenter spoke hoarsely.

CHAPTER XI

Excavation

A MOMENT later the ground erupted as a colossal metal figure, which also must have lain buried and discarded under the dust for centuries, came to life again under the ministrations of the ovoid, and staggered erect, shaking the encumbering debris from around it.

The thing was a great robot, vaguely manlike in form. The distance-diluted sunshine glinted on the uncorrodable metal of its body. But it was damaged, as the ovoid had been—the reason, most likely, for its having been left behind at the time of the great migration, as one abandons junk.

The colossus tottered. One of its legs seemed injured. For several minutes the ovoid worked over this furiously, effecting a slight improvement in the giant's movements. Then, propelled by a small streamer of fire, the ovoid darted eastward, disappearing behind a low knoll. The larger robot limped after it.

Carpenter's and Nords' strength gave out. Their fingers, exhausted by the strain of fighting paralysis, lost their hold on the handgrips and the two men slumped panting to the deck.

It was an hour or more before they could hoist themselves again so that they could peer out of the windows. By then the great robot had upended a long sharklike object on the knoll-top, presumably under the guidance of the ovoid. The slim shape was also of metal.

It looked like a rocket but glistening tentacles dangled from it. There were also tubular projections, which might have been weapons of some kind. This slim thing must also have been resurrected from the encumbering dust. Busily the ovoid and its huge companion were working over it, doubtless restoring it to a condition to perform whatever function for which it was intended.

Nord felt a cold chill. The slim rocket-form was suggestively dangerous. It seemed built for speed and attack. Nord pictured a new possibility—of robots reawakening each other in a sort of chain—building new robots—creating a culture here that was purely their own. But this was an unimportant side-thought, which he let drop under the pressure of more immediate concerns.

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"I have a hunch things will start happening very soon," he growled.

Exhausted once more, Carpenter had already sunk back to the deck as Nord did but a moment later. But a nameless dread of what the preparations on the knoll-top meant gave both men a sharpened drive of will.

"We can at least make an effort to get the Midas Touch pistols," Carpenter panted.

So they rested only a moment. Nord spied a thin magnesium-alloy rod that had been attached to the stanchion-post which Carpenter had unscrewed a while ago to use as a club. If he could manage to poke upward with that lightweight rail . . .

"Take another look out the window, Carpenter," he ordered, "while I save my strength for what I've got to do."

Sweating with the effort, the youth obeyed, lifting his eyes to window-level with agonizing slowness. "Yeah," he breathed raggedly. "The big robot has started down the knoll in our direction. The ovoid is sort of buzzing around its helper's head."

Nord gulped. If Carpenter and he were ever to regain control of the situation they would have to arm themselves within the next couple of minutes.

As fast as he could—which was at about the rate at which heavy oil flows in winter time on Earth—Nord crawled sluggishly to the rod. Then, dragging it, he worked his way to the locker, pulled himself erect against its doors.

Reaching that thin wobbly rail upward to poke down the pistols from the ledge at the locker's top was a task of a different order. From the start it seemed hopeless. His all-but-useless muscles, still gripped by paralysis, lacked sufficient control.

The rail wavered wide of its mark, slipped from his grasp, fell clattering to the floor. There was nothing to do but try once more.

"The robot and the ovoid are halfway here," Carpenter anounced.

Nord began his task more slowly and carefully this time. Maybe luck favored him. The tip of his rod came within an inch of the muzzle of one of the Midas Touch weapons. Even then Nord found it hard to believe that he was so fortunate. Concentrating with all his might and sweating from the struggle he tried to move the rod tip closer to the pistol.

Carpenter was wise enough not to say that the ovoid and the metal colossus had almost reached the ship. But perhaps it would not have disturbed Nord any further, for certainly he knew that this was so.

The rail-tip touched the pistol. At the same time there was a rattling at the airlock. The patch of insipid sunshine cast on the deck from a window was invaded by a hulking shadow.

Nord managed to remain as completely in control of his movements as was possible with his more than half-paralyzed nerves. He pushed the pistol with the rod-tip. For an instant it seemed that his phenomenal luck would hold, that he would have what he needed so desperately. But then the rod slipped off the pistol, flew outward and wrenched itself from his feeble grasp. Their last chance was gone.

IN another second the ovoid was inside the ship. A swift touch from a tentacle ended Nord's precarious command of his own flesh and he slumped down. The same thing happened to Carpenter.

Then the little monster went straight to the still-snoring Burris, while its giant henchman presumably waited outside the ship. Burris' rhythmic discord was interrupted and he made gulping noises. He gasped, cursed and muttered under his breath, then for a moment made no further sound as the ovoid crouched beside him, caressing his [illegible] with its tendrils.

At last Burris tittered in foolish satisfaction. This changed to a wild and vindictive laugh. "You two stupid numbskulls!" he gasped, unable to stop laughing. "And that double-damned Bob Harwell, who is to blame for everything! You'll all get what's coming to you!

"This machine thing just told me I'm boss and it's doing what I want. It's

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going to send a kind of rocket-robot to finish off the Harwells now on Jupiter! And it's going to fix you two good for the wrongs you've done me! *Ha-ha-ha-aa-ah!*"

Tears and sobs were mixed with Burris' laughter. There was no doubt that hysteria in him had deepened or that he was temporarily insane. He continued to sob and laugh and chuckle.

Carpenter and Nord looked at each other, their flesh tingling with dread. There was mystery here. And there was bitterness. There wasn't much doubt that Burris had spoken the truth. Evidence tended to prove his words.

But why should this ovoid accept the will of any human—especially of Burris, the weakling?

"The enigma has a certain pattern to it," Carpenter whispered to Nord as if a long discussion of the subject had accompanied their parallel reasoning. "Some of it I can understand—but some of it eludes me."

"Yeah!" Nord breathed.

Just then there was a vivid blue flash from outside the ship.

The ovoid darted up to a window and, clinging to a handhold, peered out.

Burris was mixing words with his wild laughter again. "The rocket-robot taking off to make an end to the Harwells!" he babbled. "Its inner mechanism had to warm up first. That's one thing as good as done, friends!

"As for you two, I think I'll just have my little servant put you out of the ship in space-suits. While your air purifiers slowly wear out you'll have plenty of time to think about the harm you've done me! And you can get acquainted with the harshness of Ganymede—the cold, the stars! You can laugh your heads off about it too—while I have the robots take me back to Mother Earth!

"Here, you little metal devil with the tentacles—might as well do what I say right now! Take these two fools a couple of miles away and dump them! Don't forget to close their face-plates, though! This will be good—*good!*"

Again Burris gave way to wild sobbing. Certainly neither Nord nor Carpenter could feel any pity for him then. Still Nord got from his words and actions the impression that he was like a savage and irresponsible child, whose weak and boiling nervous system found an outlet to strain in a furious tantrum.

Already the ovoid had moved to obey his wishes, expressed doubtless in fine mental waves, which its delicate instrument-senses could pick up. They must be much more sensitive than the instruments incorporated into an Earth-made sensipsych apparatus. Though mental vibrations were of course the link between the receiving set and the human mind—still, by terrestrial technology, they were not effective at a range of more than a couple of feet.

Nord's face-plate was slammed shut and dogged down. Then, using the terrific power in its small form, the ovoid, jetting fire, dragged him to the airlock. Carpenter was similarly treated. Very soon they both dangled like sacks of meal under the arms of the giant robot, that limped through the stratified fog toward the hills that ringed the valley.

The ovoid clung to the shoulder of its huge henchman and Burris, also still in his space-armor and freed from paralysis, hurried along in the rear, continuing to hurl wild imprecations through the helmet radiophones.

Nord hardly listened to him. The flavor of doom was in his own mouth. For a moment he entertained a strange idea—that Burris, being what he was, weak and erratic, would break down and countermand his orders to the ovoid to cause his and Carpenter's death. But this was hardly to be depended on.

Driven by dread, Nord's mind worked with the keenness of desperation to figure out an enigma. Finally he said, ignoring the fact that Burris could hear him too, "Carpenter—what's the primary purpose of a robot, built by any intelligent race?"

THAT the youth was thinking along the same track was proven by his quick response. "To serve," he said.

"Sure," Nord returned. "And the best way to make them good servants

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is to give them specialized emotions —something maternal—which makes service a great pleasure."

"I'm right with you," Carpenter answered. "What we've run into here on Ganymede is a robot that, being damaged, was discarded by its owners and left to yearn for centuries for the joy of service. But we weren't nearly as good subjects for such service as Burris. He was terribly scared, full of poisonous wishes for revenge against those whom he conceived to be his persecutors.

"A whole series of desires—which the ovoid could accept as commands—must have radiated from him as intense thought-waves while our minds were relatively passive. No wonder the service-starved robot accepted him as the one to play genie to."

"Yep—we were damn fools," Nord commented. "Now that the ovoid has accepted Burris as its boss, maybe it's too late to change anything. But we can try. We've certainly got intense wishes now. We don't want to die out here in this terrible bleakness. We've got to get violently scared. That won't be hard to do."

"It certainly won't," Carpenter commented. "But come on—let's get into the spirit of the thing."

Both men were already dripping with cold sweat. And there was no need for them to force their feelings.

"It's not just ourselves, Carpenter," Nord added. "Think of the Harwells and the rocket robot that is on its way now to destroy them. Any such thing has got to be stopped if it can be. Besides, I suspect that it's not just their necks either.

"There's a bigger issue at stake. Something in the mind pictures that the ovoid gave me—something that Joey Harwell said about dead-ends and the people of Ganymede—suggests what Bob Harwell may be looking for on Jupiter.

"A solution to the greatest human problem—to be taken back to Earth and used! To save the Harwells may thus be vital to the whole human future, Carpenter! So—if we value anything—let's concentrate on deposing Burris as boss!"

Neither man said any more as they fought to focus their emotional energies. Burris, openly wise to what they were attempting, was yelling and sobbing at them now.

"You can't do it! It's too late, you idiots! Damn you—*damn* you! I'm giving the orders!" His voice rose to a shrill scream, which showed how intense must be the wish-waves that were streaming from his brain.

Nord, for his part was thinking again of his vicarious companionship with the Harwells, was feeling his intense will that they live to do their work—and still to be his friends. Especially Joey —his son, in a way. His thoughts made a continuous hammering rhythm.

The weight of Carpenter's similar thoughts and emotions were added to the flood of wish-waves that must be pouring from Nord's brain. Nord, still more than half paralyzed, was nevertheless able to squirm around in the large robot's grasp so that he could look up at the ovoid perched on its shoulder.

At first he thought he saw vindictive opposition smoldering in the eye-lenses of the little monster. But did the glitter there grow gradually dull? Burris, on the ground, continued to scream and yell through the helmet phones. A strange battle of minds was going on. But Carpenter and Nord had an advantage—they were two against one.

The glitter in the ovoid's eyes rose again to eagerness as the change of command took place. In mid-scream Burris' voice broke off. Mercifully he had fainted. Aloud Nord shouted to the ovoid, "Recall that rocket-robot!"

The servant-thing hesitated, then crept down from the shoulder of its helper-colossus to get closer to Nord. Again visions came into the latter's brain, showing him now why his order could not be carried out.

"The rocket-robot can't be recalled," he said to Carpenter. "The ovoid lacks the specialized kind of radio needed for controlling such a mechanism continuously at a distance. It would take time

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to find or assemble such a radio. And there is not enough time."

"Then there's only our ship," Carpenter said.

DESPERATELY Nord snapped out a string of orders to the ovoid. "Break up our paralysis as you did for Burris! Tell your big friend to take us back to our ship. You fly on back to it ahead of us and start putting together the controls and other mechanisms that you took apart. Come on—make speed!"

Swiftly the ovoid moved to obey. In response to the touch of a tendril on some guiding device the colossus reversed its course, stooping for an instant to gather up Burris. Then the little monster darted away under its own power. The breaking of the paralysis for Nord and Carpenter, had to wait until they reached the ship a few minutes later.

Only then, where there was air to breathe around them, could their face plates be opened so that the ovoid, laying aside its other feverish labors for a moment, could grope inside their helmets to the backs of their necks and apply the small energy-shock that restored the motor-nerve contact between their brains and their muscles to full efficiency.

Then the ovoid returned to its work, toiling with incredible speed. Nord, who was a robot expert himself, tried to help. But he was sluggish by comparison. This creation of another culture—a culture whose wisdom Bob Harwell seemed to think might be the salvation of Earth-culture—could outstrip him utterly in speed and efficiency.

The reassembling of the ship's controls alone took almost ten minutes. And how long would it take that rocket-robot to reach and destroy the Harwells? Two hours, perhaps—and it had a head start! How could this presumably slower ship ever catch up? And where were weapons that could hope to be effective against that rocket-thing?"

"All we can do is try," Carpenter said. *Try* seemed to have become the basic word of their vocabulary.

As soon as the controls were ready Nord took off with the ship, following only an approximately correct course by guesswork since the calculator was not yet reassembled. The ovoid continued to work on the latter until it was finished.

Then Nord worked out the proper trajectory, using the telescope once more to locate the tiny flashes of fire from the Harwells' rocket tubes. Since Carpenter and he had first tangled with the ovoid those flashes had moved far to the edge of the Jovian disc with the rotation of the planet. By luck Nord guessed almost exactly right as to their required course. Only tiny corrections had to be made with the guide-jets.

Gigantic Jupiter was beginning to loom even more magnificently ahead. But for the two men optimism did not yet reawaken.

"We'll never make it in time," Carpenter croaked. "And even if we did get to that rocket-robot before it got to the Harwells, how could we down it?"

"Presumably we wouldn't have to shoot it down," Nord answered. "No doubt our ovoid can control it when in contact with it. *Hey!*"

"Hey—what?" Carpenter demanded.

"We're utter numbskulls," Nord growled in bitter self-contempt. "Now maybe it's too late! I'll bet the ovoid can fly much faster than we can! Why haven't we sent it on ahead? *Hey*, you tin egg—go and get that rocket of yours as fast as you can! Stop it or destroy it any way that you can! Crash into it if you have to! Only stop it!"

Moving like a pistol-shot the ovoid was at the airlock. Then it was out in space, shooting ahead, trailing blue fire.

"Maybe it'll make it in time—maybe it won't," Carpenter breathed.

Oddly, absently, Nord thought for a moment of the metal colossus, rigid and moveless once more now, left behind again on Ganymede after a brief period of activity.

Nord hoped for the best, since that was all he could do. But he was aware that Carpenter and he had had a foretaste—an inconclusive hint—of the

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kind of science, the kind of unknown that must lie deep in Jupiter. For Bob Harwell to find, if he ever got there. Tremendous it certainly was—could it help Earthians, in their great problem? That question was still unanswered.

CHAPTER XII

Into Jupiter

TWO terrestrial days earlier Bob Harwell finally put his ship into a fixed circular course above a certain spot, just over the cloud-blanket of Jupiter. It was guided by an automatic piloting device. It flew like a plane on stubby wings, its rockets sending out steady streamers of incandescence, for it was within the upper atmosphere.

The Harwells had just clipped the sensipsych recorder discs behind their ears. And other preparations were in immediate prospect. So far this adventure was following the general pattern of previous Harwell adventures except that Bob had taken certain thought and sensation filters out of the recorders.

Harwell was immensely grateful that he and his family were still alive. They'd got out of the Ajax Tower just six minutes before the explosion. But they had lost many friends in the disaster. He was double glad to be alive because of the hope of the solution he might find on Jupiter.

"Don't look so ugly, Dad," Joey growled at him without a smile.

Harwell felt a bit sheepish. "Okay, Joe," he laughed.

He was about to get into his huge pressure-suit, which had been fully equipped for the venture. Its armament was ready and its various instruments. Its jet-belt had been fueled and bolted into place around its middle. Inside its vast thorax pockets and compartments were stocked with sandwiches and beer.

Harwell needed only to draw an arm out of a sleeve of the armor, to reach what he needed. This vast shell would be like a house around him. A person could live almost normally in it. None of this was frivolous, for Harwell expected to spend the next several days alone, immersed in an environment that would be quite unimaginable beforehand.

There were two other such costumes in reserve for his wife and son. If all went well they would not be used.

Bob clambered into the armor. Under the pull of the Jovian gravity, two-and-a-half times that of Earth, the huge oxygen helmet had to be lowered into the collar-piece by means of a block and tackle suspended from the ceiling of the ship's cabin. Joey did the honors. Meanwhile he joshed Bob, as he was always supposed to do for the benefit of the Harwell fans. He had to play the urchin of space.

"Valet-service de luxe," he said. "Your girth is excessive, Dad. Shall I say anything about overworked tailors and eating too much real food? Or shall I prescribe that you take half your meals vicariously via sensipsych? Repasts that some other gent shoveled into his stomach? Sounds revolting, hunh? And the corn still grows green."

Bob Harwell grinned at his boy through a little hole, six inches across, which somehow made him feel silly. A hole that was all there was to his face-window except for the laminated disc of crystal and plastic that was tested to withstand a pressure of ten thousand tons per square inch. He left that unclamped, and open on its hinge.

The urchin of the spaceways was in his usual form. But Bob knew that Joey was being like that on purpose, to avoid sentimentality. In a roundabout way he was saying good-by, good-luck and come back all in one piece.

In the armor Bob's body lost its human lines. He looked Jovian. He looked really immortal. Though he might be going to have that disproved this time.

The "hands" of the armor were great claws, which his fingers could operate by means of lever action from inside the sleeves. The arms and legs of the monstrous thing owed their strength to steel cables and an atomic motor,

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though their movements aped the movements of the human arms and legs inside them.

Harwell used the claws of the suit to tighten the nuts that sealed the armor and the oxygen helmet together. This way he did it as easily as if he were screwing the cap on a tube of toothpaste.

He'd be falling free over the side of the ship in another couple of minutes.

Nearby were the radar and television screens with Clara at the controls. From the radio part of the television set came the weird grinding hum that previous visitors to the Jovian system had detected. It rose constantly and at a fixed wavelength, from a certain point deep in Jupiter.

Coinciding with that point the radar screen had revealed to the Harwells a shadowy oval hump, like a hill but too regular in form. The radar could give no more details except that its diameter was over a hundred miles, for there was too much dense gas between the instrument and the object.

"It's still there, Bob," Clara said.

Harwell looked at the shadow in the screen again. In it he knew that he was face to face with the nameless. No natural phenomenon explained it. His face muscles felt tight as he grinned.

He saw Clara's throat move as she swallowed hard. But she smiled and said, "Better get goin' if you're goin', Mister. But keep your feet dry!" She knew that there was no use trying to hold him back. And she had no more inclination to be idly sentimental than Joe. Kisses for luck had been taken care of before under more appropriate circumstances.

WHIRRING softly, the misshapen Atlas that Bob Harwell had become, moved to the airlock. He passed through the inner valve, closed it and opened the outer. For a moment he looked down at the vast yellow-white expanse below. Vapor it was—just intensely chilled vapor of methane and ammonia gases. Being part of a planet over 86,000 miles in diameter, the flatness of it seemed without end and without curvature. It was in visible turmoil even at a distance. Yet upward-humping clouds were quickly leveled by the drag of the Jovian gravity.

During that moment Harwell thought of many things. Clara's old wish to spend some time on the Maine coast—his childhood on Mars—whether he'd ever see the sun again—that he'd never quite got used to the strangeness of other worlds, which was perhaps why he was always fascinated. Memories of old friends—bitterness and mistrust of certain people.

But mostly he thought of what he had to do. He knew how the situation stacked up on Earth with *Mathias'* success in frightening the dreamers from the sensipsych less effective than the reverse, with the robot-police winning against him—but with *Mathias* still holding a deadly sting. Harwell had listened to the radio too.

If anything was to be done to halt the tide of violence it had better be done soon. It might already be too late. If Schaeffer would only yield a point—somewhere. But Schaeffer was a stubborn fool, unfathomable.

Strictly on his own Harwell had his one big hope of helping. It was based on the theory, quite easy to substantiate, that progress everywhere followed a similar pattern. Perhaps, down there beneath the atmosphere of Jupiter he'd find the answer he wanted. He'd better hurry.

He stepped from the airlock, began to fall from the steadily circling ship. Within a couple of minutes he plunged into the yellow-white cloud-surface of Jupiter, which the feeble sunshine could penetrate to but trifling depth.

In seconds' time he was in absolute darkness except for the glow of instruments and of the small television screen inside his helmet. He felt as though he were falling into some deep hole, sinking into some dank cistern without bottom.

Clara and Joey grinned at him from the television screen. "Don't find any-

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body *too* beautiful down there, Bob," Clara warned.

"I expect to find things extremely beautiful down here," he answered, meaning just what he said. "That shadow in the radar screen is too regular to be natural and too vast to have been built by a low-grade science.

"One of the main objectives of advanced science has always been to make things beautiful, according to the ideas of beauty entertained by its possessors. Of course such ideas in the depths of Jupiter may be different from our own."

Harwell's flesh tingled for he had made a point. To a frog the muddy bottom of an Earthly marsh must be beautiful. Yet Harwell knew that burrowing deep in the ooze of such a marsh, with the worms and crayfish, a man would be far more at home than here in Jupiter, sinking into the darkness of swirling super-chilled gases, the pressure of which increased fearfully with depth.

Everything was different here. So what would the viewpoint be? And did it really help much to believe that the beauty he expected to find originated on Ganymeade, a world more like the Earth?

Harwell continued to fall. It was the beginning of a grind which must last for many hours. He must penetrate thousands of miles beneath the visible cloud-surface of this monster planet to reach anything semi-solid.

Jovian lightnings blazed around him in the murk and thunder crashed, its concussion magnified by the high sound-carrying capacity of the dense gases around him. Gusts of hail, which must consist of frozen pellets of ammonia gas, clattered against the shell of his armor. Terrific winds buffeted him and he had to use the jets at his waist to keep from being blown off-course.

The time soon came when he had to use those jets intermittently—risking the detection of their atomic flame before the unknown—for the atmosphere was becoming so dense that falling in it was too slow, even when tugged by the gravity of Jupiter.

Often Harwell pointed his head straight dowward and let drive with the jets until he worried lest the friction with the atmosphere be heating the outer armor too much, weakening it against the mounting pressure. Once he even thought he smelled a faint odor of ammonia.

Still he suspected that he was fighting time in more ways than one. And the question was whether to expose himself to a little more danger for a somewhat shorter period or the reverse. He favored the former course of action.

And Joey, scowling from the small television screen in Harwell's helmet, agreed with him. "Sure, Dad," he said. "Keep using the jets."

Of course either Clara or Joe stayed constantly at the television instrument up above—it would never be left unattended though the time would be long. Even under frequent jet-drive, Harwell figured that the descent would take about two Earth days.

He didn't keep up a constant flow of conversation with his family. Often, for hours, there was only the occasional exchange of check-phrases. Joe saying, "Everything okay, Dad?" Or Clara asking anxiously, "Are you all right, Bob?" It was a little grim.

And Harwell would answer sleepily, or from the preoccupation of his own thoughts, "Sure—fine."

Inside his armor, near his shoulder, a television eye was set and he kept it trained on his face-window so that Joey and Clara could see what he saw. Usually it was not much—either utter blackness, or lightning-lit fog that revealed nothing.

ONCE, at about the halfway mark down to the shadowy mound that the radar showed, Harwell had a bad scare. He was in a region of windless calm then. Fuzzy, glowing blobs, a foot in diameter, passed inches in front of his face window, then wavered off, their greenish phosphorescence lost in the fog at a yard of distance.

But other blobs followed the first into view. They seemed semi-solid. They

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were translucent—and against the glow in them was limned the shadows of what might be vital organs.

Between the claws that terminated both of the great arms of Harwell's armor, fixed permanently there, were the barrel-maws of a pair of Midas Touch weapons. His thumbs were poised over the trigger-buttons. But the blobs showed no signs of offering him harm or even any curiosity. There was no intelligence in them.

Joey saw the things too by television. *"Dad!"* he gasped hoarsely. "I'll bet that they are an example of the ammonia-life scientists have theorized about for so long! Life for the big, cold planets, where water is always frozen as solid as rock. Liquefied ammonia would stay fluid and serve the needs of life at much lower temperatures!"

"That's a good enough explanation for me," Harwell replied, still feeling nervous.

The balance of the trip down was more or less uneventful. He nibbled at food, joshed with his family, dozed, chewed refresher-tablets, kept driving on with the jets, working them intermittently. His armor creaked and popped ominously under the mounting atmospheric pressure. Free-fall would have been slow here, for the dense surrounding gases by their compression, seemed to have achieved a palpable viscosity.

At last Harwell shut off the jets entirely. His own small radar warned him of some sort of surface not far below. Thousands of miles above him in the steadily circling ship Clara and Joe were both at the television set.

Harwell grinned at them tautly. "All right, gang," he said, "this is almost—it. What's my position?"

Of course they could check it at once by tracing the direction of his incoming beam.

"You're about three miles to the right of the mound-shadow, Bob," Clara told him.

"Just about the way we want it, hon," Harwell answered.

A second later he went crashing into what seemed a semi-liquid medium. He plumbed deep into it, then rose to the surface, for his armor was made to float. He'd expected something like this to happen but his surprise showed in his sheepish grin.

"Landed—*safe,*" he hastened to say to relieve the strain revealed in Clara's sharp gasp. "It's black as Hades here—none of those luminous ammonia-life blobs are around. I'd better not use my search-beam. And we'd better cut off television communication now too. It could be a bad giveaway of my location so close to the mound."

Harwell hated to break that single contact with his loved ones, with all that he loved most. But there was no help for it. He searched his mind for some parting wisecrack. Very soon he should be penetrating an enigma. He was near the end of a quest. What he found might be of vital importance to all of his kind. In his brain doubt and hope fought one another.

He was about to say something again when he saw that Clara's face was no longer in the television screen—nor Joey's either. At the same time, across the great distance, and curiously like the events in another apartment that can be heard during an interrupted telephone conversation, came the clang of an airlock, followed by strange voices.

Momentarily his heart seemed near his tonsils. Who would have come here, way out to Jupiter? With his wife and son up there alone it was worth something to know that the voices were *human.* But remembering the attempt to murder him, the chaos now on Earth, the violence and mystery all around, Harwell was not reassured. Whom could he trust? *Mathais?* Schaeffer?

"Joey!" he shouted. *"Clara!"*

Joe's face reappeared in the screen, his nose wrinkling. "It's just—guess who—Dad," he said wearily. "Our playmate, Burris. He hints gently that the two men with him shanghaied him and brought him along out here on a kind of joyride and got him into terrible trouble. But the guys look like good gents to me. Anyway Mom and I'll han-

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dle them okay. We're armed."

"*Burris!*" Harwell exclaimed. "Let me talk to him—*now!*"

CHAPTER XIII

The Great Crystal

A MOMENT later, Harwell saw the ex-Chief of Histrionics' frightened face with its now drooping jowls. It wore the marks of recent hardship. Of all people who might have come here, Harwell trusted Burris least of all. Burris was small and cheap and the wildness and terror in his eyes—echoes of temporary madness—hinted at further potentials for unpredictable treachery.

"Bob—it's been hideous," he quavered. "Get me out of here."

"That I'll do when I can," Harwell snapped. "But understand this, Burris. I once told you the truth about yourself. For this you hate me. But if, when I get back to the surface, I find that you have been up to any funny business directed at me or mine, part of you is going to be on Mercury and another part on Pluto and the rest smeared in between! Do you hear?"

Now a set of broad plump features replaced Burris' in the screen. "Don't worry, Mr. Harwell," a voice drawled. "My pal and I *know* Burris. We'll keep him in line. My name's Nord. And this is El Carpenter, a neighbor of mine." Nord's face moved aside briefly to let Harwell see Carpenter's one-sided smile.

"Maybe you can understand the facts," Nord continued. "We stole a ship from *Mathais* and skipped out to follow you. I hope you don't mind. It was like kids playing hooky from an over-fancy party. I've been a fan of yours. Go do your work, Mr. Harwell and forget Burris and us. But be *very* careful. Believe me, there's danger around here!"

Nord didn't consider the circumstances appropriate to tell Harwell his family had almost been destroyed by a hurtling rocket-robot or how Carpenter and he had sent the small ovoid flashing ahead to crash into the thing and shatter it and itself when it was only a few thousand miles short of its goal. Those had been bad minutes.

Now Harwell faced Joey and Clara again. "All right, pals," he whispered to them. "Things are as they are. Maybe okay. But be careful. We'll talk again soon. Cut your waves too."

At a touch Harwell's screen darkened and his phones died. He was alone with enigma, deep in Jupiter—and still worried and irritated by unexpected developments. But he had been reassured and Burris seemed helpless. He decided not to think of Burris as a jinx.

The detection of his radar beam, used again for a second, was improbable. In the tiny frame he saw the shadow of the great mound looming very near. Then he shut off even the lights of his instrument panel. Absolute darkness closed in. The fearfully compressed atmosphere was calm. His armor rose and settled rhythmically as in an ocean swell. A faint rustling like that of water reached his ears.

He thought of what a hell of a place this would be for a claustrophobic. He wished he might have sent a probe-robot down here in place of himself to bring back flash photos. But that, for one thing, had never been the Harwell way—which depended on the human touch.

Causing the arms and legs of his armor to move gently he swam forward through the thick stuff around him. It seemed to consist of a combination of fluid and slush—liquefied gases part of which had even congealed. Yet he knew from his last glance at his thermometer that it was a little warmer down here than at higher levels. After all it was unreasonable to suppose that a mass as great as Jupiter could have cooled all the way to its center. In fact its core, heated by radioactive elements, must still be flaming hot.

He wondered again about the grinding drone on a certain radio wavelength, that coincided in point of origin with

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the mound-shadow as revealed by radar. The drone was too even to be a signal. So he concluded once more that it must be just an incidental part of the functioning of some machinery. Many electrical devices produced radio noise. So the droning was probably of no importance.

Gradually the darkness lessened ahead, becoming at last a definite glow, which brightened to a great formless wall of bluish light. It *was* eerily beautiful. Harwell's throat constricted. The cause was part eagerness but more it was the nerve-raw fear of not finding what he had hoped to find. Being so close to the end of a quest was no aid toward ease of mind when so much was balanced between the two words—yes and no.

Perhaps it was the arrival of Burris that had frayed his disposition and dampened his optimism. Probability seemed to lean heavily toward the negative—toward the belief that he had deluded himself with wishful thinking when he had hoped to uncover here a pattern of salvation and a greater future for his own kind. The whole idea seemed to grow thin and thready, to slip away from him somehow, to lose itself in the alienness around him.

It took fifteen minutes more of paddling through the slush to get really close to the source of the light ahead. Even then the murk was too thick for Harwell to see much. Through his helmet he could hear surf pounding. His armor still creaked and popped ominously under the now steady but gigantic pressure. But he was too intent on what lay before him to pay much attention.

He could see only a tiny part of that colossal mound, of course. It looked crystalline. A black platform rose out of the slush and, set back from its glistening edge a few feet, the clear wall began. Did the whole mound float on a kind of titanic raft?

Bob Harwell thought, "We of Earth in this age could build a thing comparable in size and magnificence to this —here on Jupiter too— if there were reason to do so, if Jupiter weren't, to us, a worthless mass of gases and minerals of a kind easily available to our science at home and in quantities we could ever need."

Again Harwell felt imminent the dead-end of effort, when all desires were fulfilled except satisfaction and full futility had been attained.

HE knew that the crystal mound in all probability represented transplanted Ganymedean culture. But why would Ganymedeans, born like Earthmen to see the sun, ever want to move deep into Jupiter, so utterly inhospitable from their probable viewpoint?

From Harwell's pessimism, unbidden, arose a quick sullen answer. *A mass-will to seek refuge, to hide, to retreat from reality* in a great secure shelter that science had made possible. That paralleled the sensipsych addict's reasoning, didn't it? Nor did it seem like the way of a triumphant and successful race of beings.

Did he have to remember the apparatus parts, so like similar parts made on Earth, he had seen on Ganymede to guess that there might be a darker parallel here? One hinging on the probably universal urge to achieve complete peace and comfort?

Harwell glanced up warily. Now he could see darting long-lined shapes, limned against the glow of the great crystal mass. He could not see more than their fuzzy silhouettes through the murk but their shapes seemed mechanical, as did the hissing rocketlike roar they made. Armed guardian robots they must be. He wondered if they knew he was there.

He ducked lower into the swell of this strange sea. Its muffled rustle was mournful. He hoped desperately that his ideas of a moment ago about the present state of the Ganymedeans were wrong. Still his mind drove on devilishly along that same path of negativism.

What was it that they had retreated from on a practical plane? Perhaps it was pride that made him think of encroaching Earth-colonies. Had some

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Ganymedean mind foreseen history—a possible tremendous intrusion? And was it even good foresight now? He left the thought incomplete. He was too close to the facts to waste more energy on such haggard speculation.

He had to take a chance now. There was no other way. Besides, jagged suspense to know the truth goaded him. He waited until there were no darting shapes above him and then set his armor, which was itself half robot, to clambering out of the surf and up onto the great raft.

In moments he reached the flank of that vast domelike bulk. He crouched low to let the fog hide him better. A claw rubbed away the blur of weird dew as on a windowpane. Avidly he peered inside.

The crystal was as clear as Earth-air and clearer than glass. A phosphorescence pervaded it. The tremendous structure was half solid but there were oval chambers in it connected by passages. For as far as Harwell could see there was a succession of such compartments.

He still clung obstinately to his original hope—that after all there were beings here who had advanced far enough to have mastered the problem of a great blind alley in progress, to have gone on to greater heights of strength and culture—that somehow he might take a spark of such Protean fire of knowledge back to his own troubled people.

But now he saw no such lofty miracle. He knew for certain then that his wishes had been wild. Rather, what he looked upon was a demonstration of the classic ultimate of decadence, so often predicted and now seeming, more than ever, an inevitable trap for any sort of intelligent life, as soon as civilization reached a certain level.

In each of the countless chambers there were forms—it might be better to call them lumps or masses. Plump and pink, with a few scattered hairs sprouting from them like little golden wires.

The lumps possessed the remnants of arms and legs—even of heads, brain-cases. Once these parts must have been active and skillful. Now they were atrophied with disuse. The lumps breathed but was it even possible any more to awaken them from eternal sleep?

Did they have enough remaining mentality after ages without serious thought? He could guess that here he looked upon immortal flesh, sheltered from all danger, and rejuvenated periodically for eons, through a somnolent decay that had at last reached all but the final zero of nothingness. Trail's end.

It was horrible—Harwell shuddered. But worse than the horror was his defeat and the bitterness of its meaning. There was no Great Answer to bring back to Earth. Probably there was no Great Answer at all.

He had had every reason to believe, before coming to Jupiter, that there was advanced and ancient science here. But deep in his heart he must have guessed that it would manifest itself like this. For futility can become an all-pervading barrier. And a race had either to progress or regress. There was no standing still.

ONE single thing he could salvage from his former purpose. So he let his eyes photograph the spectacle carefully, knowing that with the recorder disc behind his ear they were cameras for the sensipsych. His contempt and revulsion, not only for these poor lumps but in a parallel way for the dreamers at home, were sinking into the record too. For now the thought-filters had been removed.

Harwell let himself wonder what sort of dreams the burnished bands around the shrunken skulls of these monstrosities still could give them. Yes, he had expected to find beauty here—even though from an unhuman viewpoint. And that beauty must be here—science-given.

What could it still provide these creatures in that direction? The bright colors enjoyed by babies, perhaps? The whirling multi-hued kaleidoscope? The warmth and softness that a kitten loves

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after hunger has been satisfied? Or even less?

Harwell pushed his thoughts further. Moving about those inert shapes in the crystal chambers were little mechanical attendants, their metal forms carefully padded. Was this further evidence of the probable truth—that the migration from Ganymede itself had been planned by robots, that this great crystalline structure had been reared by robots of another sort?

But even to the mechanisms the situation as it was must be degrading and stunting. They were never able to rise above the condition of nursemaids to hulks that were useless even to themselves.

Bob Harwell could contain his bitter fury against circumstance no longer. He glanced upward, waited for a sharkish metal shape to roar away, then opened up television contact with his own ship on a narrow and, he hoped, leak-proof beam.

In his screen he saw five faces crowded together—Clara, Joey, Burris, the two other guys. "Personally—I'm okay," he said softly. "But the payoff is hardly what I wanted. Have a look for yourselves. Don't say anything. Here's where Schaeffer's precious sensipsych or, more properly, the trends of our present civilization lead."

Harwell swung his armored form to right and left, so that the people in his ship would get a good television view of what he saw through his face-window.

"Burris," he said after a minute, "I'll bet that in a thousand of these monsters here isn't enough intellect left to equal one dog, dreaming of a bone. And believe me, Burris—if we get back to Earth in time—here's one Harwell adventure that nobody—you or anyone else—will tone down. The dreamers will get it in a blunt dose with not one thought of mine rubbed out of it. Let them feel their shame and their fear."

Bob Harwell paused and sighed wearily. "It might do a little good," he continued. "Yeah—they'll be scared. But the poor devils have been scared a lot already. And then what'll they do about it? They'll still be up against a blank wall. So, in spite of everything—this trip is a flop. But we've got to try."

He watched Burris' face most of all—Burris, the once-smug advocate of the status quo, because it made him feel like a Big Somebody, who was going to be a Bigger Somebody.

"Stop preaching, Harwell," Burris said thickly. "You're a sensipsych man yourself." But his eyes looked glazed and full of a dumb terrified consternation at what he had seen.

"Let's drop the whole thing for now, folks," Harwell suggested, his tone tired with fatigue. "I'm heading up for the sunlight."

As often happened, he was thinking of his best friend, Carl Corliss, the clown, the builder of cartoon sequences. Corliss, who must be dead. What would he say if he saw what was here?

As soon as he had cut communication again Harwell slipped quietly back into the sea of liquid gas. He swam out maybe four miles to be sure that the murk would hide the glare of his drive-jets, then started upward upon their steady thrust.

He had to climb against gravity but that hardly mattered. He had plenty of power. The frictional heat of too great speed, possibly warping and weakening his armor, was the only limiting factor. But, embittered, he felt less cautious now. He figured that he'd make better time than during the descent.

And so it was for most of those vertical thousands of miles. Trouble came, not entirely without warning, toward the end of the climb.

"Something's following you, Dad!" Joey told him tensely. "The radar shows it."

Minutes later Harwell was deep in the confusion of battle, in which nothing seemed quite clear except each sharp-cut motion of defense and the will to save himself. There it was—the shark-shape of a Ganymedean guardian-robot, looming through the fog. Harwell fired at it with the Midas Touch weapons between

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the claws of his armor.

The thing's blue lights winked out defensively and he had to use radar. He fired again. The robot fired back with what must have been similar armament. The din was terrific. Once more Harwell pressed his trigger-buttons.

This time he was victorious—the fog hid exact results. But he won a respite. Something was wrong with his feet. He couldn't feel them. Automatically operated cords had tightened around his legs, around the rubber lining of his armor there, to prevent the cold, poisonous air of Jupiter from getting in.

He didn't know it but below his knees, where the cords had bitten deep with a kind of desperation to save the rest of him, the flesh was already frozen solid. The pain in his knees was awful. His air-purifier system raced madly, trying to clear away the ammonia fumes that strangled his lungs. Oddly, a discarded professional judgment came to his dimming mind—that this part of the record would need toning down. It was too raw for John Public.

He kept his direction upward, his jets going full-blast. There was a guide-mechanism, which he did his best to set. And all the time voices yammered from his phones. The faces of his wife and boy were in the television screen.

All he really heard was, "We're coming down for you, Bob!" And, "Dad, we'll get you!"

Then he blacked out.

CHAPTER XIV

Running Battle

UP in the Harwell ship, circling continuously over a fixed spot and under the control of a robot piloting device, preparations for a rescue attempt were swift.

Joey and Clara Harwell were white-faced and anguished. But in their lives they'd learned something of tragedy and violence. Clara was quite cool. She knew she had to be.

She and her son got into their rigs—duplicates on different size-scales of Bob Harwell's armor.

"You'll be in charge while we're gone, Mr. Nord," Clara said. "Be ready with the weapons in case we have a surface battle outside. And be ready to move if we tell you."

"Thanks, ma'am," Nord answered quietly. "I'll do that." And then in an effort to reassure her, "I've followed enough Harwell adventures to know how everything works."

The kid gave him a grim damp-eyed glare of warning to do his job well. Then he turned up the force of the look a few million volts to hurl it in another kind of warning at Burris, who stood, blanched and uncertain, at one side of the control cabin.

"Better all get into regulation space-suits too," Clara added. "It'll be safer for everybody. Your own ship will be all right as is, circling unattended above ours. So—hold your thumbs for us."

After Anson Nord and Ellwynn Carpenter had helped fasten the faceplates of the two armors Clara Harwell flashed them both a brief smile and even tossed it on to Burris. Nord couldn't help contrasting her manner with his own wife's when he had last seen her.

Then the two Harwells were out of the airlock and over the side, flashing down under jet-power. They vanished into the cold cloud-plain of Jupiter a moment later and Nord and Carpenter were left with only the television to maintain contact.

They put on space-suits—Burris was already so attired. Nord and Carpenter both looked pretty pale, themselves. Nord said, "It's tough for any man to see a woman and a kid going out to face danger while he stays behind—even when it has to be—because they've got the training and the skill and the know-how while he hasn't. . . ."

"Not near as tough as it would be for us—if we were in their shoes," Carpenter answered shakily. "But we've got pride and shame and a feeling of duty,

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that we can't live up to—because we don't know how, Nord, though we feel we should.

"Those are the same forces that brought us way out here, Nord . . . Desire to live and learn and win self-respect. It's the force of the times. The psychological rebellion goes on. Don't worry—you can handle the ship, at least. You learned that. But their pressure suits are too new for us."

"And we can watch them by television," Anson Nord commented. "We can do that much for them. And if they want to give us any orders . . ."

So they kept watch, tuning their receiver to the sets in Bob's, in Clara's and in Joey's armor in continuous rotation. They didn't hear much of what Joey and Clara said, for the latter were beaming their calls down to Bob. But the visual impulses were fixed to go upward so the faces were always clear.

Bob stayed completely unconscious for an hour, his face relaxed and waxy. Seeing him in that attitude Anson Nord felt a legend fall a little. Some inordinate hero worship—that he had known was inordinate—began to fade out of the depths of his mind.

Bob Harwell looked very human—just another guy with a certain reckless streak—a pal in trouble. Nord wished desperately for Harwell's rescue. Otherwise, in all the endless ages, there would be no more of him.

Bob Harwell's eyes opened blearily just in time. There was no need to use the radar or to tell the other Harwells that again there were pursuers. Their expressions and lip-movements showed they knew. Harwell winced and with evident effort brought his weapons into action, winning a few moments' respite.

When the next attack came his wife and son were alongside him—great dim potent shapes with frail human vitals, and atomic bolts in either claw. Maybe they had a slight advantage in armaments over the several lean robot-shapes at their heels as they started upward. Or else those torpedo-forms were bent primarily on capture instead of killing.

It was strange how Nord and Carpenter—and Burris too, peering over their shoulders—saw that fantastic running battle. Nord almost spun the tuners. The television pictures came in nearly superimposed from three viewpoints. The field of vision of the television eye in each armor was wide, so the face beside it was always within its range.

Face covered face in a constant shift of both individual and expression. Fear, fury, hope, grimness—it would be wonderful stuff for the sensipsych if toned down. It had better action than the stories of history in Colonial America—when wives and kids took up guns against the Indians.

Nord was beginning to believe the Harwells might make it—even though Bob had passed out again. His jets still kept working and by now his family and he had won very close to the surface of Jupiter's cloud-blanket. Maybe—maybe not—for the shark-shapes from the guard of the inert Ganymedeans were still after them.

"We'd better man the weapons," Carpenter said sharply. So Nord and he did so. The ship was armed with Midas Touch tubes of ordnance size. Both men wished desperately that the robots attacking the Harwells could be ordered to desist by mental waves, as could the ovoid on Ganymede. But these shark-shapes were of a coarse type, insensitive to such commands.

NORD and Carpenter still managed to watch Burris but not enough. He stood there at the back of the control-cabin, his pale and pudgy face working. Then, as fast as Jupiter's gravity permitted, he lumbered to the ship's controls, grasped levers. Jets roared. The craft dipped on stubby wings and shot toward the cloud sea.

Nord and Carpenter moved as fast and as straight as they could. They bore Burris down. Nord stumbled back to try to regain control of the ship. But a space craft can build up a lot of speed in a few seconds, even when it flies as a plane. It plunged deep into the cloud-sea.

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Carpenter held Burris floored. But Burris writhed and screamed. "Damn you both! You're the fools this time—not me! Why didn't you go down with the ship to get the kid and the woman? Why does everybody blame me for everything? How did I know what the sensipsych would do in the end? How did I know that Harwell's wife and brat would have to go over the side?"

Burris' yelling in shame and fear and remorse was only part of the confusion that reigned in the ship and around it. Carpenter sent a fist crashing through him and preventing him from committing further errors.

Then, to help Nord, Carpenter got busy with the television and radar, trying to locate the Harwells. But minds could not work fast enough. More precious seconds were lost, blundering in the thick fog.

Carpenter heard Clara Harwell shouting, "Where are you, Nord and Carpenter? We've broken clear. *Hurry!*" In the television screen he saw faces—like picture-pages flicked swiftly through the fingers.

Bob Harwell was unconscious again. Joey's and Clara's expressions showed anguish like that of seeing a locked door when safety is all but gained. They were holding Bob between them. No shark shapes were visible—but they must be very close beneath the surface of the fog-sea.

"Up into the clear!" Carpenter yelled at Nord.

Seconds later the weak sunshine broke around them. Clara and Joey were trying to open the airlock of the other ship from the outside.

Carpenter, at a Midas Touch tube, depressed the firing lever, aiming at two slender, metallic forms that had just darted up from the silvery expanse, below. He scored several mortal hits. But as usual there was that brief "hang" before the minor-scale atomic explosions came. One of the Ganymedean robots had a chance to fire too.

It is doubtful whether, in the dazzling fury of its own and its companion's sudden end and from a mile away, the shot was more than one percent effective. The stream of neutrons it hurled was cut off at its source before it could reach more than a fraction of full power. But its aim was true enough.

The airlock of the other ship—in which Nord, Carpenter and Burris had arrived on Jupiter—erupted blue-white incandescence. Out of the dazzling flame they saw fragments emerge—pieces of airlock—pieces of armor. The injured ship wavered but its piloting device regained control and it kept circling.

Nord's and Carpenter's respective hearts were in their mouths. But somehow the Harwells or what was left of them did not fall either. It was not till Nord guided the large ship over the damaged craft and made contact with it, allowing Carpenter to go down nervously, and with horror in his heart, clinging to a line, that they found out how this could be.

"It's the death-grip of the claws of their armor, clinging to the fender-rails beside the airlock," Carpenter said through his helmet-phones. "You'll have to pass down a flame cutter."

It was true. In their last efforts to save themselves the members of the Family of the Spaceways, made famous by George Schaeffer's perhaps infamous sensipsych, had clung to what was within reach. And with the lapse of their consciousness no one could move controls, causing their great power-driven claws to let go.

All of the three armors were in the main intact. At least their general form was not changed much despite the holes in them, and the parts that had been blasted away. Inside there still might be faint dregs of life.

Nord spoke flatly as they hoisted Bob Harwell's huge armor into the larger ship by means of block and tackle. "They would have made it if Burris hadn't monkeyed . . ."

Maybe Burris heard. Maybe he didn't even try to listen. He stared with the horror of those who have failed to understand grim realities beforehand at the battered armor. He was dazed.

Just as Carpenter was about to go

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down again for Clara and Joey Burris managed to move ahead of him. Probably he was again trying to help in some wild way. There was guilt in him, shame and some kind of pride. But he was awkward and afraid. He lost his hold on the line. The ponderous Jovian gravity took him.

THERE was no chance to get Burris back. In seconds the fog-sea of Jupiter swallowed him. For a long way down Carpenter and Nord heard his wordless screams in their helmet radios until the rising pressure of the Jovian atmosphere crushed his lightweight spacesuit.

Long before that happened the two men from a pleasant neighborhood back on Earth had moved all of the Harwells into the larger ship. If there was any life left every instant counted.

But in the midst of swift action, Carpenter found an epitaph for Burris. "I'll bet he was a failure as a bad man. Not smart enough even for that—not tough enough. So maybe he tried to turn hero. There he was an even worse flop."

It was pitiful and terrible even now. It was as though Burris were the symbol of a civilization that had gone weak and frustrated. Nothing he did was any good.

Nord and Carpenter felt worse, as they applied the first aid of their epoch to the Harwells. In all three life flickered dimly. That was all.

Ellwynn Carpenter, having been a medical student, took charge. The bodies were placed in three shallow plastic tanks. In previous eras, keeping them alive at all, except for a few minutes, would have been completely hopeless. But this was the time when eternal life was theoretically possible—barring extreme violence.

Even so chances amounted almost to zero. Nord's stomach turned over again. His eyes were full of hot mist. For these people were his friends. Misfortune had come to them while fighting for the good of all humans everywhere.

Half of Clara's face was gone and an arm was off at the elbow. Joey had lost both legs. Bob's legs had been frozen solid—ironically enough they were both intact but they would have to be amputated. His thorax was ripped wide open. And all three bodies had been repeatedly riddled by flying fragments of hot metal.

Because they had to be Carpenter's hands were fairly steady as he made incisions in the proper arteries and attached tubes from the blood pumps. Hearts might stop, but what living flesh there was would still continue to be nourished. The blood was "culture" blood—part of regulation first-aid equipment.

In a special heated cabinet it had been kept alive for months, pure and increasing in number of corpuscles and volume. It was human blood, typed and grown from samples. Now it was put to work. It was kept oxygenated and purified mechanically.

Liquid food-substances were mingled with it. With the aid of the apparatus through which it flowed it could have kept a leg alive, separate from a body—or an arm or any other part. Though what good is a broken mass of human flesh?

There was no reason for what Carpenter did except the old medical principle that human life must be preserved as long as possible. Now, with clear liquids, he sought to flush away radioactive taint, to reduce it with counter-radiation. Then he removed Bob Harwell's frozen legs and did his best to suture up gaping wounds.

Anson Nord had picked up one of the little recorder discs—it had been Bob Harwell's—and fixed it behind his own ear. "This sequel belongs on the record—I hope for the sensipsych vermin to experience," he snarled. "They and their eternal life and their fear of death and discomfort, their sophisticated boredom and thrill-hunger!"

He damned them perhaps more than they deserved—because three active eager people had worse than died, trying to help them.

"How long will the Harwells stay alive?" Nord asked.

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"I don't know," Carpenter answered. "Quite a while. But there's no known way to help them. And presently damaged brain and other tissues will suffer spreading deterioration."

"We could fly 'em to Mars to a clinic," Nord suggested.

"Clinics are better at home—for the little they're worth," Carpenter answered. "And we're the only ones left to try to get Bob's recording on the air as he wanted. It might do a little good if we hurry—and if we find a way."

Carpenter didn't sound like the violent young intellectual he once had been.

Nord nodded. They had to try something. He didn't say aloud how tough winning even their limited objectives was going to be. Grab control of a big sensipsych broadcast station—against sure opposition from the winning status quo—and robot police at that. And Schaeffer. Again the *Mathais* group, to whom the very names Sensipsych and Schaeffer must be poison.

As Bob Harwell had been, Nord seemed surrounded by cynical presences, none of which he could trust. But he set the calculator in motion to plot an Earthward course.

He remembered Joey Harwell as he had been—a kid with short bristly hair, the urchin of space, in a way his son. He thought of Clara—a pretty friendly woman with a world of pluck. Bob had been his favorite sensipsych star once. Then a pal. Now—well—let it go.

Nord thought of his own wife, Margaret, of their house and flowers, of all the companionable moments they had shared before fear and weakness had broken her love for him like a brittle thing. But even in her fright she had wanted to help two lost children. He preferred to think of that part. He wondered how she had fared since.

He thought about neighbors, even the obnoxious ones like Mrs. Kovis. There were good wishes and nostalgia in remembering. He hoped that she might remember him in the same way. He felt that what he meant to do was very worth while, if only from the good-wil angle.

CHAPTER XV

Homecoming

LEAVING the smaller damaged ship to circle above Jupiter until its atomic fuel finally gave out, Nord set the guide-mechanism of the Harwell craft. Carpenter and he strapped themselves to bunks. Escape from the Jovian gravity lasted longer and was harder to take than escape from the pull of the Earth. But in open space they breathed more easily again. Here they were not in danger of attack by Ganymedean robots.

Nord had started the ship off at the greatest velocity possible. Time passed. Until the day came when Nord, awakening from a brief doze, heard someone blabbing on the newscast. Carpenter was listening too while he clutched a stanchion with white-knuckled fingers.

". . . the mysterious *Mathais* himself—if he is an actual person—has so far not been hunted down. Does he in defeat—both as a terrorist and also to a large extent as a theorist—really mean the threats that he continues to broadcast more and more vehemently? Or is their fulfilment even beyond the moral limits of a madman?

"The Minute Men he honors as the fruits of his efforts are to him a disappointing minority. While the dreamers, following the established pattern of life under the management and reassurance of the powers that be, are numerous.

"So *Mathais* finds himself confronted by an unyielding wall, consisting it seems of certain human traits, among which are stubbornness on the part of leaders unwilling to give in to him, frightened apathy and incredulity elsewhere, a very general belief that since most of his secret bands have been wiped out he too must soon be accounted for.

"The morning is beautiful. There is dew on the grass. New Orleans was the last city to be bombed—over a week

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ago. It is hard to conceive of a planet like ours being destroyed. Perhaps it can't be. On the other hand perhaps we suffer from a terrible lack of imagination. Is there sweat on my brow? Has a certain moment already been earmarked? I wonder. So long, folks."

By then, both Nord and Carpenter *were* sweating. "That's enough for me," Carpenter growled.

Nord considered trying to develop the new sensipsych records as a means of saving precious time when he reached Earth. Then he thought that he might spoil them and the sweat poured out of him more profusely. It was fortunate that, at a speed of several hundred miles per second, even vast astronomical distances are not covered too slowly.

Finally they were checking velocity—coming in toward the troubled Earth, which, from out in space, looked as serene and beautiful as ever.

"The obvious thing to do is to land in some fairly deserted place," Anson Nord told Carpenter. "Here in these mountains, close to the City, there are a number of sensipsych broadcast stations. We can come down, scout around. We've got the weapons," he added grimly.

The trouble is that when you do an obvious thing someone has always guessed beforehand what your intention is. Using the robot guide Nord came slowly straight down on his flaming jets in the hill-country.

Carpenter had no more than stepped out of the airlock for a whiff of the fresh evening breeze of Earth, when a half-dozen youths, as ragged and unshaven and grim as any that had ever existed, closed in on them, menacing them with a variety of weapons. Some wore black scarves around their throats but none bothered to use them as masks. These men must have come a long way in the understanding of primitive things.

"All right, you two," one said. "Get back into your ship. Never mind touching anything. We'll do that for you."

In another minute the ship was flying south to another group of low mountains. Once a police craft tried to pursue. It was left far behind, its prow disappearing in a flash of fifty-thousand-degree heat.

After the landing Nord and Carpenter were hustled out into the woods and up a rutty road sheltered by trees. They passed rough huts and several camouflaged ships, near which large Midas Touch tubes pointed skyward. There was a stack of crudely made but deadly looking capsules. Small they were, compared with what they could do.

Some distance beyond was a circular hole, ten yards across, going straight down into the ground. Above it was mounted the tool which had bored it—a tool that, in a slower less-violent form, employed the same matter-shrinking principle as the Midas Touch weapons. The lip of the hole looked glassy, like soil that had been fused.

Chocked ominously on rails that slanted straight for the hole, were two old ship-hulls, welded end to end and fitted with iron wheels on which to roll. It took little to guess that those hulls were now filled with the same mechanism and the same atomic hell-stuff as the crude capsules—though on a tremendously larger scale.

Sweat trickled down Nord's nose. "If those things were let fall into the pit, there'd be a crater here, many miles in extent." He spoke softly to Carpenter. "Since we're near the coast the ocean would rush into it to meet not only white-hot atomic heat but a vast area of the exposed molten vitals of the Earth. There are still more tremendous atomic forces down there—natural ones. What would happen is anybody's guess."

For once Carpenter looked like a nervous boy again, scared out of his wits.

FARTHER on, at a safe distance from the radiations of the drilling, a man in a greasy coverall came out of a tent. He was very tall and thin and did not mask himself with his black scarf. In his gray eyes, which looked pale compared to his now sun-reddened skin, some elf of laconic humor still

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laughed gently and bitterly at the world.

"I don't see any Harwells," he remarked as a beginning.

"It was their ship all right, boss," said the leader of the bunch who had brought Nord and Carpenter. "And they're in it—blown to hell beyond redemption—but still alive in a first-aid setup. These guys flew their ship."

For a moment, the thin man studied Nord and Carpenter. "Who are you fellas?" he said at last.

"You can see that we're friends of the Harwells," Nord growled. "And friends of friendly people. Who are you? Or can I guess already?"

The thin man smiled more mildly. "Right—*Mathais* himself," he said as if it didn't matter but with a warning glint in pale humorous eyes. "I needed another name. Long ago in school some kids called me that because I liked math. I remembered."

Nord's jaw tightened. So Carpenter and he had fallen into the hands of the high-priest of violence, the man who had wiped out cities. The man who was responsible for the rapine and murder committed by his henchmen—and who now threatened ultimate disaster. This mild looking bird? How could you ever tell what went on deep in a human soul? Then Nord began to wonder if he'd seen this man before.

"Maybe you're also Carl Corliss," he suggested.

"Maybe. Names don't matter—yours or mine."

So it was better and better or worse and worse. Corliss—a clown in a checked suit—for the sensipsych. Also a creator of cartoon sequences—infinitely careful work. So that a dreamer could become a whimsical humorous character—a humanized crow or animal or tree.

"Bob Harwell was my sidekick at Ajax," Corliss continued reminiscently. "We liked our work. We didn't like—some of its effects. I figured I'd do something about it. It had to be drastic. Why should I tell him? He wasn't cold enough—my way.

"It wasn't my fault that some of my boys even tried to get him. Well—what's one man, to the fortunes of a planet? When the time came I pulled a disappearing act. But I knew Bob was onto something out Jupiter way. I wonder what he found?"

"Enough," Ellwynn Carpenter cut in. "A race of sensipsych victims, you might call them. Things that were hardly alive anymore."

"Don't sound so sore about it, kid." Corliss laughed.

Anson Nord had begun to feel hopeful again. "Look," he said. "You're still trying to scare people out of their dreams. So we're not your enemies, we're your friends. Maybe we've got a better scare with the sensipsych records we brought back. Take us to a broadcast station."

The pale eyes of *Mathais*—or Corliss—hardened. "Easy, fellas," he said. "I'll make my own suggestions presently. Come with me to Bob's ship."

Inside the craft he stood for a minute over the plastic vats that contained what was left of his friends. Before horror he never turned a hair—at least outwardly. He might have been a clown again, with faded hair, smiling elfinly at an audience. He was a cold fish.

"You boys are going on a quick little journey," he said at last. "In Harwell's ship. I'm making a gamble with an old enemy, partly for the Harwells' sake. Your records go along with you—for luck maybe. You seem on the level. Just follow your noses. But for luck, after I've set your robot pilot, I'll break all of your controls so you can't change course."

A little later, as the flight was about to begin, a cold tingle along Nord's spine made him say, "Corliss—if you wondered that super bomb dumped into the hole you made your boys wouldn't obey—they'd be committing suicide."

Corliss shrugged. "They might obey," he answered mildly. "And if they didn't I could pull the chocks myself."

AT the end of its flight the Harwell ship landed bumpily in what was left of the park, decontaminated and partly cleared, beside the ruins of the

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Ajax Tower. It was perfectly evident to Carpenter and Nord that Corliss had sent them to Schaeffer, his arch enemy, perhaps just in the hope that he might be able to do something for the Harwells, perhaps on more of a gambler's hunch.

At first Nord felt cold doubt, as if being delivered into the hands of the one most likely to stop all of theirs and Harwell's purposes. But when police closed in around the ship there was nothing left to do but go along with fate—which might pay off.

"We must see George Schaeffer—at once," he told the police. "We've brought the Harwells back from Jupiter."

It worked like a gilt-edged passport. They were led along a cleared passage down through the ruins. An elevator took them, and the three plastic cases to the lab-vaults far beneath the Tower, where the atomic blast had changed nothing at all of the restless, Gargantual activity.

Schaeffer appeared, looking small and diffident among his great toys. "Hello," he said with a simplicity that, considering the legendary reputation of the man, seemed almost shocking. He was the world's core of mystery.

Nord only nodded grimly toward the three plastic cases.

"What else did you bring back?" Schaeffer asked.

"We should know each other better before I answer," Nord said. "I'm Nord. This is Carpenter. Having been chief inventor of that damned sensipsych you're probably prejudiced in its favor. Though you must know its faults you've kept right on urging people to go back to the dreams—even though that's just the reason why a guy called *Mathais* has been throwing threats that would make your hair curl if you had any sense.

"He captured us when we landed. We saw that he has what he says. Now I suppose you'll want us to tell you where he is—so police craft can be sent to attack. A sure way to make him set off that toy he's got rigged!"

Schaeffer scowled. It might have been anger, worry or both. "Return to the sensipsych was the best way to keep down hysteria," he said, "and to get people out of the way so the robot police could do their work.

"I do not say that the present misuse of the sensipsych or the existing condition of man are right. I understand the motive for the violence-cure group, though their method defeats itself. And isn't it another form of cowardice to yield to threats?

"Besides I have hesitated, not quite believing that a logical idealist could destroy his planet. Though maybe I'm wrong. Moreover, I am a private citizen, without direct authority in group decisions. And I have been busy—approaching part of our problem from another direction. This is an explanation—not an excuse."

Schaeffer sounded defensive and strangely humble. Nord felt himself softening toward him. Now Schaeffer was examining the gruesome contents of the three plastic cases with his eyes.

"Bad," he said. "Though I've been working on something. You know the old matter-to-energy-to-matter transformation concept. Maybe it answers something. But what I *might* be able to do for the Harwells, will still depend on a lot of people—thousands at least.

"Having talked with Bob Harwell before his departure for Jupiter, it was not difficult for me to guess what his purpose was in going there—since I had already seen photographs of what is on Ganymede. So, Nord, there should be a sensipsych record of some sort.

"Whatever its content I still would not place too much hope in its usefulness alone. Our problems are far too great. However, Nord, I think it would be helpful. I would like to have it."

There was a moment's pause. Then Anson Nord yielded—mostly to Schaeffer's logical tone. He had to follow the gamble through. There seemed no other way. For the Harwells' sake and more. It was like depending on a physician's word in sickness. He reached into a pocket and brought out a box with the three recorder discs in it. He still didn't know for certain whether he was giving in

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to a master plotter or not.

"I hope you're on the level," he growled. "Could I help?"

"Thanks. Yes—by disappearing for a while," the scientist answered almost brusquely. At once he had become tense and bemused It was as if he were another featherbrain, who forgot about everything else when his mind was occupied with its shadowy abstractions. It was unpleasant to think that on such the world's destiny might hang. Yet Schaeffer seemed gripped now with a definite objective.

It was already night. Back in the Harwell ship Carpenter said, "Tough hours—worse than papa waiting for an old-fashioned baby. The regular rains won't start till two a.m. Maybe we'll wander around a little—in the less ruined part of the city."

"*You* do it," Nord grumbled. "I'll sleep and wait."

But as soon as the younger man was gone, Nord laid aside his concern about Schaeffer, *Mathais* and the riddle of dead-ends, left the ship himself and found a phone—a real visiphone.

Long-distance connections were made almost immediately by pressing a few buttons.

Nord was calling his father-in-law's country place. In the screen a woman's face appeared—Margaret's. A bit worn and tired but beautiful. Now her expression wavered through the various stages of surprise, guilt and joy.

"*An!*" she gasped. "You're all right—safe?"

"Sure," he replied. "How do I look, Margaret?"

"Terrible—thinner, though," and she laughed.

"Same to you, Marge. What have you been up to?"

"Kids," she told him eagerly. "A million kids. Well, anyway thirty-seven. Here at Dad's place. Refugees. It's been fun though—substantial. Haven't even touched a little dance-dream. An—I'm terribly sorry I ran out. I couldn't help myself but it's been burning me up inside ever since. I'm changed. I couldn't do it now."

SHE was a different Marge. She was tired and worn instead of sleek and bored. The spirit inside her was different. You could see it shining in her face and it gave her a new beauty. It wasn't all-wise and weary. It was eager as if fed by real satisfaction. Anson Nord felt glad and eager too.

"Look, An," Marge urged. "Can't you come out right away? There's so much we could do. Sit on the porch, talk . . ."

"I know, Marge," he answered. "Dance—too. I mean it, sweetheart—I'd honestly go for it now. But I'm tied up with something. It keeps me biting my nails. Maybe tomorrow."

He did feel wonderful. Only in the back of his mind was there a suspicion that this might be just the joy of seeing each other again, that even if things worked out all right otherwise they would someday sink back into an old rut of boredom because there was nothing sensible or constructive left for any average person to do.

"For heaven's sake—what are you so tied up with?" Marge asked. "What have you been doing?"

"Ten minutes ago I was talking with George Schaeffer in his lab."

"Quit teasing, An!"

"Who's teasing? Before that I ran away to Jupiter with Ellwynn Carpenter."

"Stop it, sweetheart."

"On the level, honey," Nord said, his voice now unmistakably serious "Many strange things have happened, you know. I even found out that *Mathais* and Corliss the funny-man are the same. And he's still on the loose.

"Ellwynn and I brought the Harwells back from Jupiter, horribly mangled. And we saw terrible things—a prophecy of the results of the sensipsych. Schaeffer suggests that maybe he can fix up the Harwells—with the help of a lot of people."

"I'll help," Marge cut in. "You mean Joey too—the brat with the cute scowl? What kind of help, An?"

"Schaeffer didn't say," Nord replied grimly. "And how are you going to know whether a guy like that is *for* the

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human race or looks down on it like so many insects? That's what I'm waiting to find out, Marge. I'm going back now to keep watch. So long till a little later."

Twice Nord tried to argue his way back into the Schaeffer lab but the guards said, "No."

Back in the Harwell ship, he hovered near the previously almost unnoticed sensipsych set, an XD-10. He had a hunch.

Near midnight there was a red signal—meaning special broadcast. Nord's heart leaped. Maybe this was it. Quickly he prepared himself for the short-term reception, not jabbing the intravenous nourishing needles into his arms.

CHAPTER XVI

New Sequence

THERE was no preliminary speech of any sort—the opening of the vision was just an impression of going over the side of a ship as Bob Harwell had done. And all of Harwell's bitter worried thoughts were in the sequence—and his scornful pity for the dreamers. The sense of falling was terribly real. So was the plunge into the frigid fog of Jupiter. Anson Nord had the impression that this dream was as unescapable as reality.

He knew that millions of fans must normally be experiencing this new Harwell sequence. But he didn't know that all the people at the moment under the spell of their sensipsych sets—at least those within the vast range of the transmitter beneath the ruined Ajax Tower—were being compelled to experience it. Other programs were simply being dropped and this one substituted.

But Nord already knew the general substance of this sequence and agreed with it. Others did not.

Take Mrs. Kovis as an example. She hadn't stayed with Margaret Nord and her child-refugee project very long. She had rather wanted to but the explosions of some minor battle nearby had frightened her. She had slipped. Did it matter any more? Besides, her husband's identity card had been sent to her—charred and torn.

"Attacking a town at night with a squad of *Mathais'* henchmen he had been killed by the robot police." Under the shock of grief and surprise her old habit called to her more than ever. To be away from the shaming presence of Margaret Nord she sneaked off to a house left deserted by its fleeing inhabitants. Of course she made sure beforehand that there was an excellent XD-10 set there.

And then? Well—like that sorriest of creatures, a woman gone to drink, she neglected even to comb her hair. Dreamland was more wonderful than ever in contrast to realities that had grown hateful and dangerous.

And so it was now—at the great ball celebrating her triumph in *Faust*. Until this moment . . . For the ballroom of the Imperial Palace, with all its glittering throng of handsome nobles and gorgeous ladies—she was as usual the most gorgeous—was growing unaccountably dim. Even the bald pate of her impresario had lost its shine, was fading away!

And Mrs. Kovis was somewhere where she did not like to be. There was another kind of glitter—that of instruments and controls. And a weird shape was lunging out through an airlock. And she was another kind of woman—a woman concerned for her man but full of a queer sort of eagerness for mysteries in which the real Mrs. Kovis had no interest at all. Being a woman, her mind automatically selected the viewpoint of Clara Harwell, which was incorporated into the combined three-record broadcast.

Mrs. Kovis was more annoyed than frightened. "Oh," she told herself silently. "One of those silly Harwell adventures. The station must have got their wires crossed somehow. I must write a letter of complaint."

The sequence went on—like a well-cut movie film of long ago in which only

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the essential dramataic parts were retained—but with their harshness unsoftened. Mrs. Kovis struggled to awaken, but she could not. Her prissy annoyance became anger, then fear. She did not know that the sleep-binding impulses of the sensipsych had been purposely made stronger. It was as though she were locked in a nightmare.

At last, by television, she saw Bob Harwell groping in vast blurry dark. She saw shapes in crystal chambers. Vaguely human, pink, inert—horrible.

The sight was like a wave of guilt and self contempt thrown at Mrs. Kovis. For these horrid, useless things were identified as almost a future equivalent of herself by Clara's thoughts. For seeing one's self as others saw you there was no mirror as blunt and heartless as the sensipsych.

Shame chewed at Mrs. Kovis' soul. She wanted to scream but could not. And the devilish successsion of incidents went on. Melodramatic, perhaps, but vivid and factual. It came to Mrs. Kovis that there was no fakery here.

The boy went down after his injured dad, the woman after her husband. Mrs. Kovis seemed to be the woman. She felt courage and determination that seemed to mock her own selfish terror. But she felt that terror too. She hurtled down through endless fog.

Things were around her. Her enfeebled spirit might have been driven insane except that some carefully balanced mechanism, either in her own brain or in the sensipsych apparatus, dimmed that awful clarity now and then just at the danger point.

There came that long rush upward to safety. The ship was gone. Only the other was there, its airlock sealed. Then came an intolerable searing agony such as Mrs. Kovis could never have imagined. Just for an instant.

Then from another more abstracted viewpoint—one Anson Nord's—she saw the mangled bodies. That was the worst of all. More than ever truth far transcended imagining. Eternal life nullified suddenly—in a kid who should have been in school, a brave kid who had tried to rescue his dad. In a man who had the strength of a man. In a woman who thought and felt far beyond trivialities.

Mrs. Kovis might truly have gone mad now. Denying that all this was so—running from it, so to speak, to hide. But the shame was there and the courage—even some of the *know how* of courage. Never was the magnificence of the sensipsych as a training device better demonstrated than in the giving of this lesson against its own dark triumph or misuse.

And now a voice spoke in the dreams. "Maybe they can be saved. Will those who live near and who are interested come to the Ajax tower?"

MRS. KOVIS did not go mad. For she forgot about herself. Deep inside her, never truly called on before, were compassion and a will to be helpful. It had been scorched out of her by fact that left no excusing lack of vividness.

It did not matter that to her the Harwells were just reckless adventurers. The drive in Mrs. Kovis was single and clear. She was terribly worried. But she had a purpose, a duty. *Without that purpose the dream might have done little good.* She needed the duty and the duty needed her. She felt almost proud.

She broke from the dream easily now. She hurried from the house and through the night. First she'd see Margaret Nord . . .

Mrs. Kovis was only one of many millions who experienced the last Harwell adventure from one of its three viewpoints and with similar results. Perhaps she was not even a good example. For how about those who were real Harwell fans—who loved the visions of space and other worlds but who took them solely as escape—in perfect safety? No screen stars in the old days had ever had such a following.

And there were the other types of addicts. There was Melton Harms, Cord's old neighbor, and his contraband recordings. And the thousands like him. He had been a Minute Man, had become disgusted with that. He had backslid

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into his old rut. His recordings were privately owned, and this Harwell adventure was being broadcast.

But his set was on—which gave the incoming waves that changed programs a wedge by which to take control. So now the form of a harem beauty faded from his arms. And he was given the works. He was amused at first when he found a neighbor of his in the sequence. But the windup was pain which made a simple hotfoot not ever worth a smile. Then he saw those bodies. He was a good man at heart. Deep down he admired those who lived reality and he yearned for it himself—as all people must.

How about Tom, Dick and Harriet, who in another age would have found their hilarious escape watching a Donald Duck picture? How about those who liked to become Tarzan or some great detective? They got the works too. The retreat to reality was enormous.

It was not just those who took their dreams only for entertainment and shelter who were hit. There were also serious students—young men exploring sensipsych exhibits of Coal Period flora as perfectly mocked up as science could know. Other youths dreaming similar shows of the inner secrets of atomic structure.

Perhaps it was unfair that they too should be caught up in the general exodus from vision to fact with the ultimate picture of the decay of a race thrown at them—with the desperate plight of three people pointed out.

From among the worst dream addicts there were some who did lose their minds. But these must have been truly sick and in need of treatment beforehand.

Anson Nord recognized the voice that made the appeal at the end of the sequence, as Schaeffer's.

A bit groggy from the experience, puzzled and still wary, he left the ship and walked over to the ruins of the Ajax Tower, where a crowd was already gathering in the nocturnal rain. It was not possible for the weather-towers to bring this regular precipitation to a stop on short notice.

There were even small children in the crowd. And minute by minute more people with set worried faces arrived—by car, by aircraft, on foot. Nord did not know but the order had already gone out to turn back further arrivals.

Carpenter returned from his jaunt around the city, grabbed Nord's arm. "Hi," he greeted. "I heard about the broadcast. What cooks?"

Nord pointed to a large metal tube, lying on the ground near the entrance to Schaeffer's lab. It was some fifty feet long, seven feet in diameter. There were what might have been electric cables welded to it. Nord hadn't noticed it before and could only conclude that it must have been put there within the last hour. It was roped off and armed men were guarding it.

Carpenter was still asking speculative questions. Nord hardly heard them—for Margaret his wife had popped out of the rain to throw her arms around him.

"We flew in, An," she said. "Father and Mrs. Kovis and I. Mrs. Kovis told us about what came over the air on the sensipsych. An—what's going to happen now?"

Nord hugged his wife, grateful for her presence. He saw that the older woman was weeping. She looked very frowsy, compared to her former well-groomed self. Nord's father-in-law showed him none of the anger of their previous meeting before Nord's trip to Jupiter. He looked confused and scared.

"I guess we'll soon see what's going to happen, Marge," Nord said. "The guards are doing something."

In another moment an amplifier system blared out George Schaeffer's voice. "You were all called here for a reason. Those of you who still wish to help the Harwells, please follow instructions. They are simple and results will not be harmful. Please file slowly through the large tube before you. Shall we proceed?"

There was a big lump in Nord's throat. He had never seen Bob Harwell face to face while Harwell was conscious. But he knew that Bob was his

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kind of man. And Joey and Clara were swell. Enmeshed with their personalities was the romance of the interplanetary regions, which, since he had seen them in reality, made a stronger appeal to Nord's blood in spite of the hardships he had endured.

Nord glanced at his wife: "I've got to go into that tube, sweetheart," he said. "You stay behind if you want to."

But she shook her head and smiled.

IN the crowd there was hesitation—fear of a trap or of newness perhaps. There had been so much speculation and so many rumors. That Schaeffer favored a civilization of robots, to succeed that of man—that he regarded modern humans other than himself as little more than vermin—that he had plotted to rule. It has often happened that human fancy, groping at the unknown and telling tales, has thus obscured and confused the facts.

But at last the crowd, led by a few brave individuals and driven by the same need to help that had compelled it to assemble, moved forward. Nord and his wife, her father, Mrs. Kovis and Carpenter were among the first to enter the tube.

If there was really a glow inside it was scarcely more than a lesser darkness. Maybe Nord felt a slight stinging tingle in his flesh. When he emerged his muscles were a bit sore as if after vigorous exercise. That was all.

"I feel like the victim of a punk gag, the only point of which is its pointlessness," Carpenter grumbled nervously.

Nord accosted a guard. "Look here," he said. "I'm Anson Nord. Carpenter, here, and I brought the Harwells in. This is my wife. We have a right to know what's going on."

The guard got on a phone. Within a few minutes Nord, Marge and Carpenter were in the underground workshop. Schaeffer only nodded to them. But they could watch.

The bodies were in new transparent vats. A milky gelatin almost hid them from view. You could see where Bob's and Joey's feet should be—but weren't. They had lost them. And that was only part of the damage.

But under closer inspection something else was apparent. A film like fine-spun cotton, dyed flesh-color, was forming imperceptibly, deep in the texture of the gelatin. No, it was more like spider-web than cotton—it was that diaphanous. It must have weighed almost nothing—yet. But the support of the surrounding gelatin allowed it to retain form without collapsing.

It looked like what it certainly was not—one of the demonstration devices of transparent plastic, used to show muscle, nerve, blood-vessel and bone structure. In Joey's and Bob's vats the phenomenon already showed faintly the outline and inner form of legs, feet, toes—taking shape and building slowly toward normal substances.

Margaret moved closer to peer earnestly at Clara Harwell's face—which was half gone. No—over the bare bone and flesh of the exposed structural detail a diaphanous mask, replacing what had been lost, was gradually growing denser, between delicate grids.

On a nearby table the visitors saw that Schaeffer had placed recent photographs of Clara, as if these in part must be the pattern for repair.

Deep behind this miracle was the long known fact that matter and energy were only different forms of the same thing—that matter could be converted to energy and back again, perhaps to its original form—far away or nearby.

Stories had been written of people who traveled like that, even between the planets, the matter of their flesh converted to speeding intangible energy and then reconverted far away. Here exactly that same principle was being employed for another purpose in medicine.

Margaret put the explanation into words softly. "While we walked through that tube some form of power dissolved maybe one ten-thousandth of the substance in our arms, our legs, our vitals—corresponding to the parts of the Harwells' bodies that were lost or damaged.

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A kind of homogeneously spread sample.

"So little was taken from each donor that there was no harm—only a slight soreness. The energy of converted matter flows here from the tube, maybe along cables. Here it is converted back into flesh for the Harwells.

"Each sample, mingling with those from preceding donors, builds a slightly denser structure. It's a little like blood-transfusion. Normally solid flesh is produced at last. I'm no scientist but I can guess that much. Do you think I'm right, An?"

Nord nodded.

George Schaeffer spoke at last, "Yes—this is what I was working on to help change what has become wrong with life. Immortality in flesh that still can be destroyed makes people fear death more than ever because there is infinitely more to lose. It promotes caution to the point of mollycoddling.

"But now, if what I am trying to do succeeds, each person can have his body ray-charted down to the last cell—down even to minutest individual detail of brain changes that makes up memory and personality.

"Then, in case of accident, almost anything can be replaced. So the fear of death is lessened. And undue caution and weakness end—I hope. Though this by no means answers all of our difficulties."

Schaeffer sounded humble and very earnest. The shadows obscuring his intentions began to fade and he emerged more as the benign legend, but with a human touch.

The visitors waited until the replacement process in the bodies of the Harwells was complete. But this did not necessarily mean success. What good is a complete body if it does not live?

"Go now, please," Schaeffer ordered, brusque again. "We must see what will happen." He sounded tired.

NEXT ISSUE

EARTHMEN NO MORE

A Captain Future Novelet

By Edmond Hamilton

CHAPTER XVII

Tension Over

NORD and Marge and Carpenter waited outside with the crowd. At dawn the news came, relayed by a guard who shouted over the sound system.

"The patients will probably be all right."

It was a strange dawn, not physically much different from many others. Now there was ragged cheering which, however, did not break into full force. In one way it was a happy dawn. Minor objectives had been achieved. The lives of a much-loved family, long in the public eye, had been saved.

The excessive use of the sensipsych for pleasure and escape had been labeled emphatically as an insidious evil. Peace reigned again after violence. And the populace in general had had its taste of reality, of need, of courage, of fulfilment. Even the mysterious *Mathais* might have been satisfied with all this—as far as it went. George Schaeffer had made a more complete conquest of death.

But where did all these successes lead except back to that unsolvable flaw in Utopia, that poverty of plenty—of too much richness—as in some old-time business depression but far worse? Nord and his companions, in fact every thinking adult in the whole crowd, looked on that quiet glowing dawn and read in it the same question.

There was a kind of windless placidity and beauty that could never last. Life had to go on moving—building, destroying. It was against sound principle to destroy and yet, in perfection, how were the energies of man to be used and satisfied?

Where was the Big Solution? Where did the road lead now?

For an answer to all this the crowd still lingered before the ruined Ajax Tower. George Schaeffer had just

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achieved a triumph. Therefore he was the man of the hour. Therefore the crowd waited for his advice. They shouted his name.

"Hey—Doc! Come out and talk! Where do we go from here?"

It was the shout of the usual brass-throats, always evident in any large gathering. But now they voiced the general thought of the multitude.

Schaeffer appeared at last, looking very small in a ruined window of the Ajax Tower, most of which had by now been decontaminated of radioactivity by counter-radiation. His voice came through the sound-system.

"I intend to lead no one. I am not made for it. And to follow a leader too much has been proved bad in principle. I intend to think for no one. We have a problem. If there is a great answer I don't know what it is.

"For some people the problem does not exist because they have some consuming interest—they will never have time enough. They will never be bored, or purposeless. A serum of some sort might help correct a deficiency of interest in others—but why a serum? Those who need it, must be truly ill?

"Life has changed within the last two centuries but the enjoyment of it remains the same in basis—love, friendship, appreciation of beauty, struggle toward achievement, the delights of learning, surprise, change. Most of this involves effort — something ancient which in this era of ease has not only been discredited but almost forgotten as a useful road toward satisfaction.

"So shall we work to learn what we do not know for the joy of it? Shall we cease to be just the possessors of a civilization of gadgets, and broaden our awareness and culture, and become wiser? We love our lives—we think life wonderful. Hidden in that fact, perhaps lies a purpose that can never end.

"If life is worth having, then it is worth giving to others. Then the old urge to reach out and out, starward now, is not a sorry joke or a futility at all, but something great. There are unborn generations to be built for in an era at last almost without death. There is emptiness to fill with happy people, dead worlds to be made habitable. And it can go on and on.

"If that is a jest for the sophisticated, the wise-foolish, then there is nothing left—then there has *never been* anything left since life began! Then all the richness of living that our ancestors struggled to attain for us has been without point. Then there is no generosity, no gratitude. Then the weird rumor that a robot civilization should succeed ours might as well be true. . . ."

As Schaeffer paused there was silence in the multitude, marred only by the titters of a few, who managed to find something funny in what he had said.

Schaeffer grew truculent. He looked smaller than ever up there in that ruined window—and still uncertain. Not an all-wise legend.

"What am I talking for?" he yelled like an angered schoolmaster. "I've said nothing new—nothing that could be a credit to me. I've said nothing that each one of you couldn't figure out for himself if he troubled to use brains and courage!

"We have all had a hard night. You're tired. I'm tired. But I'm busy. I have a thousand years of work ahead and thousands of years of interests to disfruit. Your problems are *your* problems! Lean on yourselves! But the best of luck! Now, if you'll excuse me . . ."

The small figure was gone then from the window. And Nord and his wife saw how it was. Schaeffer was great, perhaps. But against the great mass of humanity he was just a humble little man, sinking back into comparative obscurity.

Obviously he was no plotter but just another human product of his times, as was the pathetic and incompetent Burris, the fanatical *Mathais* or Corliss, who had done ghastly things, probably in the sincere belief that they were for the best good of the most people.

So, in recent history, there was no great plot to dominate anyone—there were no real villains. And from *Mathais* there seemed for the moment less to

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worry about. For the time being people had emerged into reality as he had wanted. His threats now lacked a reason to be fulfilled.

There was still dangerous tension in the morning air. The great riddle of this era certainly could not draw an easy and glib solution just from a few words spoken by a famous scientist. People milled around restlessly before the ruined Ajax Tower.

"What'll we do now, An?" Marge asked. "Find my Dad and go home? I'd like to go back to our own house, An. Homecomings are wonderful after confusion. And old friends will be there. I've heard that Dave Clinton was our local leader of Minute Men. Or should we stick around here awhile—see how people are taking to—possibly a New Age?"

"I think we'd better stick around, Marge," Nord said softly, almost with warning. Though seeing old friends was a nice thought.

ELLWYNN CARPENTER was optimistic. He smiled at his neighbors. "Guess I'll be back in medical school soon," he said, grinning. "Mind if I wander off by myself now to thin things out?"

Nord and Margaret wished him luck. His words were a sign of something. And they soon saw many similar signs in that milling, excited, questioning crowd. They saw a burly man, who must never have touched a musical instrument before in his life, lugging a huge bull-fiddle, which he must have just purchased. A gleam of grim purpose to master the thing showed in small eyes that hid under shaggy brows.

By exact contrast they even saw a little skinny man, who had probably taken his only exercise via Mickey Mouse sensipsych sequences, burdened with a brand-new punching bag.

But as the morning wore on the classic example of a New Urge appeared to the Nords in the form of Mrs. Kovis, spruced up but still somewhat awry, carrying—of all possible things—an ancient cookbook!

She paused with Nord and Margaret for a moment there in the street—they had all wandered far from the most damaged section of the city—and chattered like a magpie.

"Would Ellwynn Carpenter laugh if he were here!" she said. "It was his idea—remember? Isn't it wonderful, what's happening to everybody? Dr. Schaeffer scolded us, didn't he? 'Interests' he said—'culture.' Well—I've got to go now. I think, while I'm about it, I might even consider hunting down a new husband. I think my poor John would have wanted it. Till later then! So long."

Her eagerness was almost pathetic. And that was the way it seemed with so many of these eager optimistic people. They'd had their taste of reality, of course, of usefulness. And they were thrilled by it. They were trying so hard to hang onto it—furiously, courageously, humbly—that they grasped at trifles.

But Nord was wondering if it could ever last—after the drumbeats of excitement and novelty died down and plain day-to-day living in the deadening perfection of Utopia had a chance to bring back bored all-wise looks to faces that were now as eager as those of children at Christmas-time.

Then, once more with nothing substantial to aim at and to struggle for, would they backslide to misuse of the sensipsych toward that ultimate decay he had seen in Jupiter? The chill of the thought seemed for the moment as inexorable as the chill of death centuries earlier.

Against all this he felt only a reacting and furious determination. "We must not slip back to the old ways, Marge," he growled. "Not now. We've got to find and hang onto purpose!"

Margaret smiled. "I've got a purpose, An," she said. "I think many other women have discovered it too—judging from certain smiles I've seen this morning. Dr. Schaeffer mentioned giving the joy of life to others.

"He shouldn't have had to say it because I knew it was true. So—there'll be children, An—ours. And many mil-

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lions more—actually born, and born apart from their mothers' flesh. They'll have to live somewhere, Anson Nord."

"You mean it, Marge—for us?" Nord demanded incredulously.

Marge nodded. Her self-assurance was easily the equal of Clara Harwell's.

The idea of having a child went through Nord like drumbeats. But this was less than half of the thrill he felt. The primitive drumbeats went on and on and they were glorious. Schaeffer had not talked foolishness.

"If life is worth having, then it is worth giving to others."

There was no perfection. The nearness of compassion to hate and horror proved that. But suddenly, in the eternal movement and change of human life, Anson Nord was no longer lost. There was purpose. The drumbeats would go on and on.

"I know now what must be done, Marge," he said softly. "And I'm sure that plenty of other people are agreeing with me and another hint Schaeffer gave us. They and I had better get together."

WAS it ironic that at that same moment the Harwells, who had done so much to break the grip of the sensipsych and had been living examples of the satisfaction of reality, were deep in a quiet dream-sequence of the Maine Coast?

It was wonderfully soothing psychotherapy. It was a change from harsh living to something gentle. It washed away memories of terror and dulled the faint echoes of pain that surged through drugged nerve-channels. It urged on the flickering impulse to live that might have wavered otherwise. It promoted healing.

Clara Harwell had always wanted to go to Maine to rest, to watch the sun on the ocean, to hear the pounding of the surf and the wild cries of the gulls.

Her manfolk liked being here too. During moments by himself Bob Harwell played the piano, his untutored fingers seeming to follow effortlessly the recorded movements of a master hand. He had always wanted to learn to play. It was one of the many things he had meant to have a go at if he ever found the time. There was something amusing in the piano part of the sequence nonetheless.

"This isn't me playing," he'd tell himself, chuckling. "And I'll never be this good. So it's sort of ridiculous."

Joey, the urchin of the spaceways, found himself sprawled on a beach, reading a book. He liked doing that. Still, as the days passed, he began to find something wrong with the whole setup.

So, when the Harwells were finally brought out of the sleep after the first part of their convalescence and allowed to hobble around, Joe had a prompt comment.

"Shucks," he said disgustedly. "If we can go to Maine by sensipsych why can't we *really* go? It would be more fun."

His father laughed aloud—because it was such sound philosophy, and was expressed with such blunt unthinking simplicity.

Really to do things was deep in the nature of man.

So the Harwells went to the real Maine. Clumsily Bob thumped on a real piano. His son read real books. His wife saw real gulls and rocky coast. And it was all more satisfying, more fun.

In Maine Bob finally learned that *Mathais* had been Corliss the clown—his best friend. With this information came the sequel, learned from some captive *Mathais* henchman soon to have his brain changed and his memory blotted out so that he would become a new person. Treatment, it was supposed to be—not punishment.

After sending Bob and his family to Schaeffer Corliss had gone for a walk in the woods. Maybe to think about his defeat. Not knowing how close eternity was, and maybe not caring. It wasn't any fancy weapon that got him. Just a leaden bullet from an old-fashioned rifle in the hands of a Minute Man sniper.

Bob Harwell got a bad jolt out of

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learning all this—for Corliss was still his admired friend, who he knew had been sincere.

Solemn feeling marked the end of a vacation and the return to thought about cold facts with which Corliss too had struggled. From across short Earthly distances plans and blueprints for a new age began to arrive for Bob Harwell's consideration. For the Harwells must be part of it.

There were blueprints for new dome-cities and ships of space. There were plans to roof the asteroids with crystal, give them atmosphere and water, make of those useless masses of rock and meteoric iron garden spots for the expanding race of man that would march on to fill the emptiness.

Bob Harwell's eyes began to shine. These plans were official. So there was no kidding about them. Here was solid *purpose*, where none had seemed possible before. So the Harwells too felt in their blood the excited drumbeats. There were even notes about the proposed expansion of the great genetic laboratories.

"More people, that means," Clara commented. "And why not? There's endless room. What difference does it make if most of them grow from ovum to birth in a solution? That's the modern way, isn't it?

"And why shouldn't there be millions or in time billions more human beings to enjoy life—love, the awareness of and the building of beauty, the charm of accomplishment? What better *purpose* could people have than to give life generously? And what could provide better satisfaction than the needed work for such a gift?

"How many dead worlds are there left in the solar system, counting the many moons of Jupiter and Saturn—worlds yet untouched? What difference does cold make when we have atomic energy—or airless aridity when there is transmutation of elements?"

CLARA was really excited. But Joey grabbed the subject away from her. He scowled into a corner of the living room of the bungalow that had been provided for them.

"The best part is that the purpose can go on and on," he growled. "It doesn't have to stop with the limits of the Solar System. With transdimensional overdrive for spaceships already in the theoretical stages, who says that the planets of the stars are too many light-years away to be reached?

"Many of them must be deserted and could be taken over without bothering anybody. Maybe in a hundred years the jump beyond the Solar System toward the nebulae can begin."

Bob grinned to himself. It sounded like the Epic Destiny of Man. It wasn't the kind to talk for the recent sophisticates, who looked always for selfish motives, backed by intricate reasoning—while they sneered or smiled at great sweeping simple concepts as being too crude for their delicacy of taste.

It also, he thought wryly, put the cart vastly ahead of the horse. The power of Earthly science, though great, was as yet by no means big enough to match some of the giants of Joey's leaping imagination. Though it well might be so in the interval that he had mentioned.

"Hold on," Bob chuckled. "So far we should think only about the asteroids. Those poor Ganymedeans on Jupiter are going to be undisturbed by any serious alien activity anywhere near them for a long time. Making the asteroids habitable again is job enough to keep a large horde of people and robot devices busy for the next thirty years at least—here and out there. That'll burn up human energies for that long anyway."

The next morning the Harwells had visitors. They had had others but not such special ones as these. Anson Nord's face was sun-reddened because he had been much out in the open, busy with preliminaries to the asteroid project.

He was an engineer, specializing formerly in robot-repair. Many men such as he were very busy now. It was not that he wielded great authority that made his visit and his wife's special. It was that Ellwynn Carpenter and he

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shared with the Harwells a memory of Jupiter and had helped save their lives and the future.

But Nord found that he had less to explain to Bob and Joe and Clara about things to come than he had expected. They already knew.

The Harwells walked along the beach with their guests.

"It's been almost unbelievable, Bob," Nord said. "People had their taste of fear and horror and compassion—and unselfish thinking—about Clara and Joe and you. The worst fear was broken and the savor of being worthwhile was good. They understood the emptiness of their former scared and superior cynicism. And they're hanging grimly onto what they think they can be.

"It makes them happy and excited. Effort is honored again. The sensi-psych becomes a useful thing, not a master. That giving-of-the-gift-of-life idea and building for the millions to come has taken hold. Me? I'm going out to the asteroids with the first contingent. Marge will follow as soon as some reasonable habitations have been set up."

"I'll be out there as soon as I finish my medical course," Carpenter put in. "Maybe I'll even find time for a new cultural hobby there—archeology. Study of the few artifacts left by the ancients after their world exploded."

Margaret Nord was aware of the dangers and the strangeness ahead, aware that nothing would be easy. "There is no perfection," she mused. "But I guess maybe there *is* a Big Answer, after all. It's just the same old answer though—thought and interest and determination and industry. And generosity—and a willingness to adapt to ever-changing circumstances. With all that you can always find a purpose." She was smiling to herself.

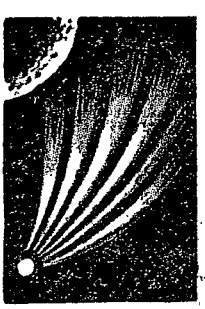
Absently Clara Harwell hummed an aimless little tune.

Joey hurled a beach-pebble far out toward the incoming rollers that broke with a thrilling roar near him. Seagulls screamed and their cries were a sound of distance and high romance.

Just then the universe seemed infinite and Man and his works still very small indeed. There was a long, long way to go.

•

FASTER THAN LIGHT!



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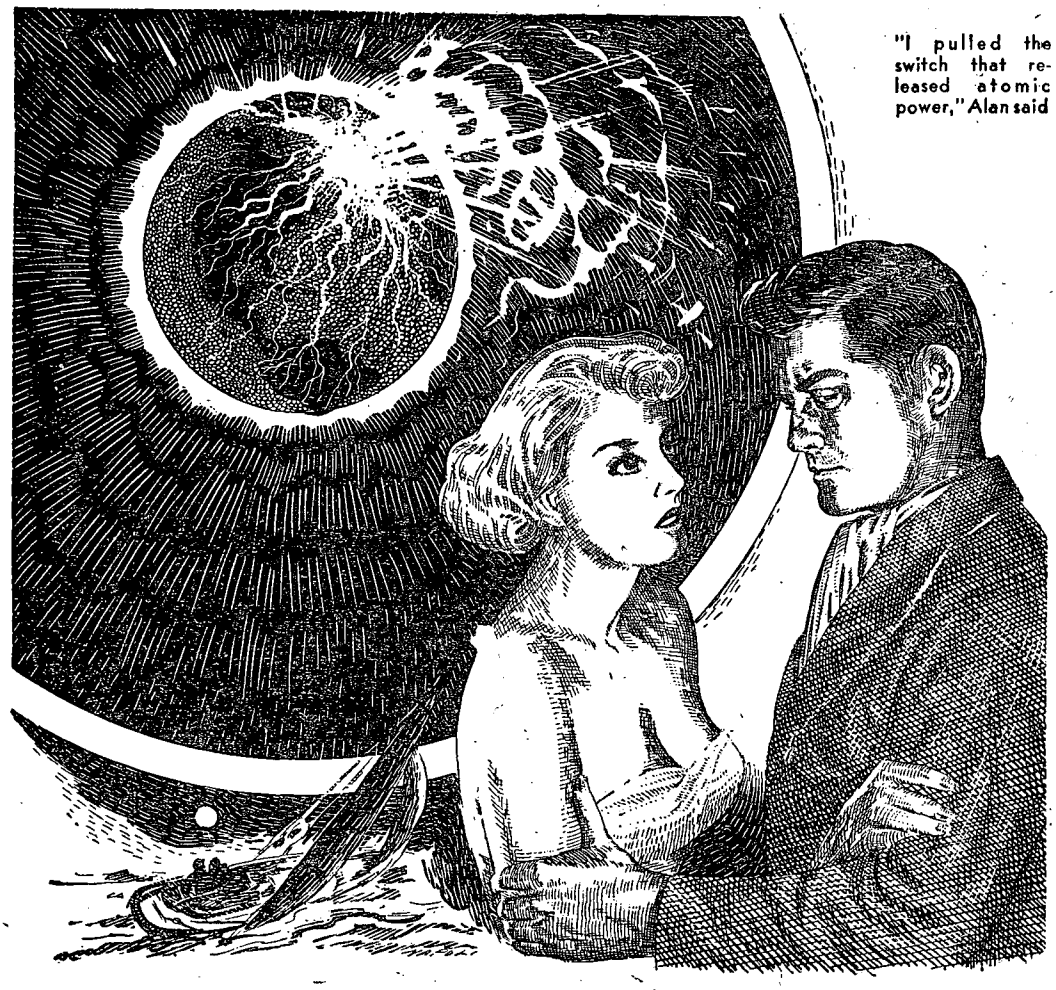

"I pulled the switch that released atomic power," Alan said

TIME TRACK

By CARTER SPRAGUE

Burnet's fabulous guesses were strange, too strange—as if he could peer through the murky veil of the future!

FROM the moment she met him, "Dee" Lord sensed there was something strange about Alan Burnet. It was not his appearance—he was almost handsome in a sensitive way, he handled his long lean body with easy grace and he was as well dressed in a casual way as any man in the room.

It was an effluvium, an aura of sorts, that he carried with him. He was neither in conflict with his world nor master of it—nor was he conquered by it. He

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seemed, in some odd way, to *accept*. It was the only word Dee could think of and Dee, like many women, was very much aware of such things.

Because he was different and she sensed it, she felt the inner antennae of her being quiver in response to the challenge. And she rather resented the fact, even though it was interesting.

She was having lunch with Mike Regan, her lawyer, in the main dining room of Twenty-One on a perfectly usual Saturday when Alan Burnet appeared at their table. Mike, who had fallen in love with her, was anything but pleased by his appearance.

"This is Alan Burnet, another client of mine," Mike told her when Alan simply could no longer be ignored. Mike, usually a cool and calm social practitioner blurted, "Never bet with him—unless you're in a mood for charity."

"Oh, come now," said the newcomer, smiling faintly as he sat down in a chair pulled up by the waiter. "I'm not infallible."

JUST then, as if to give him the lie, a well-fed stranger with grey hair came up, pulling hundred-dollar bills from a well-stuffed wallet. He apologized to Dee and Mike for intruding and handed the money, a considerable sum, to Alan.

"I've been looking for you ever since the fight," he said. "How did you know Charles was going to win by a knockout in the second round? You're either a seer or a fixer."

"You pays your money and you takes your choice," said Alan, putting the bills away. He did not seem especially happy about it. He added, "Sorry, Fred, but I begged you not to bet with me."

"See?" said Mike Regan when the bet-payer had left. "The guy's not human."

"Oh, I'm human—too human, I fear," said Alan Burnet. There were shadows back of the blue of his eyes.

"Don't you really ever lose?" said Dee Lord, fascinated.

He shrugged. "Of course. I'm like everyone else." She thought she detected disbelief in his statement. He went on with, "I have to pick my spots. For instance, if I bet that the next person to come upstairs would be red-headed my chances of winning would be exactly the same as anyone else's."

"Don't you believe it," said Mike, looking increasingly sulky as Dee felt her attention drawn more and more to Alan.

"We'll see," said Dee, turning her eyes toward the stairwell. There was a long, exasperating wait before anyone came up. Then their waiter appeared and came hurrying toward them. His hair was virtually non-existent and what there was of it was white.

"I don't always win," he said to Dee and there was a note almost of entreaty in his voice.

"You didn't have any money down," said Mike half-angrily.

"Because you told Miss Lord not to bet and didn't want to put any down yourself," said Alan.

Dee thought, "Oh, dear!" and hoped they weren't going to act like nasty little boys. But just then the waiter bobbed up at Mike's elbow and informed him he was wanted on the phone downstairs.

"Have a *nice long* talk," Alan Burnet told him as he rose reluctantly from the table. When he had vanished the newcomer slipped promptly into Mike's chair and began to eat his vichyssoise. Dee looked at him with half-amused astonishment.

"It's all right," he said casually. "Our Mike will not be back."

"When he comes," she said, not wishing to be stampeded by a stranger, "it should be interesting." She met Alan Burnet's eyes accusingly but he only grinned and told her not to worry about it.

"I'll eat his lunch," he said, "*and* pay his check. Could anything be fairer than that?"

"Well, when you put it *that* way," she said. For some reason she was not surprised when a waiter appeared later and handed her a small envelope. She read the hastily scrawled note it contained, which said that Mike had been called away by unavoidable business, was sor-

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rier than he could say and wanted her to run up a huge check on Alan Burnett. Finished, she passed it across the tablecloth to the newcomer. He read it in silence.

"How did you know?" she asked him finally. She was not an excessively curious person but she was feminine and wanted to know.

He made a deprecatory gesture, and again she noted how gracefully masculine was his every motion.

He said, "It wasn't exactly difficult. You see, I spotted you coming in with Mike. He handles some of my affairs and I was able to arrange to have a mutual friend put in a summons for him."

"And then you simply walked up here and took over," she said, meditating. She caught the eye of the wine steward, who promptly came over, his huge chain clanking about his neck. She said, "May I see the list?" Across the table Alan Burnet winced.

She ordered a magnum of Bollinger brut and, later, some 1854 Napoleon. Then she proceeded to enjoy the meal as she had not enjoyed a meal in too long. Nor was her enjoyment lessened by the fact that she knew Alan Burnet was dynamite for her—nor by the fact that the bill for the meal and drinks was going to cost him close to a hundred dollars. Dee was no fool but she was a woman who had been hurt by a man and wanted a little of her own back.

He paid the check, looked ruefully into his wallet, then across at her with a wry grin.

"Come on, darling," he said. "I guess we've got to make some money if this is your speed."

"I have a lot of speeds," said Dee with dignity a trifle enhanced by the Bollinger. But she knew she was going to go with him, just as she knew his "darling" had not been the usual casual term of endearment so often tossed meaninglessly across the tables about them. She was woman and so, of course, she knew.

But in the back of her well-shaped auburn head, as Alan Burnet ushered her into a ridiculously low-slung little MG roadster, one thing puzzled her. Alan had spoken of "making money" as if it were something he just went out and did. The delightful smoothness of her forehead was faintly creased as he headed the little English car out over the Triboro Bridge. Then he said something ridiculous and she forgot all about it.

It was Saturday and they were running the big race at Belmont. Alan had clubhouse entree and they sat in the big bar and sipped long and luscious mint juleps through straws. Around them and outside the huge crowd milled and roared as the races were run. But they were locked in a little world of their own.

SUDDENLY Alan Burnet looked up, saw that the stake race was coming up, excused himself and left her to place a bet. He returned a few minutes later and they resumed their sipping and dreamy wonderful foolish talk. After awhile it was time to go.

"I hope you didn't lose too much," said Dee Lord, feeling suddenly guilty at what she had done at lunch. She had not been able to avoid learning from chatter around her that an outrageous outsider had won the big one at close to a hundred to one.

"Lose?" he looked at her in astonishment, pulled a small handful of hundred-dollar tickets from his side pocket casually. She looked at them and gasped. They were all of them on the winner. They represented the better part of a hundred thousand dollars.

"How can I—" he began, then stopped abruptly, his lips tightening, his light blue eyes suddenly haunted. She was all at once aware of his eyelashes—a bit enviously. They were much too long and dark for a man—for any other man but Alan Burnet.

"How can you what?" she asked, only half aware of her words.

"Never mind," he told her, his voice strained, almost harsh. "Never mind. I don't think I want you to know."

Dee let it go for the moment. Then, in the excitement of the evening that

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followed, in the long drive back to the city after stopping for dinner at a fine farmhouse restaurant halfway across Long Island, in the mere exciting closeness of Alan Burnet, she forgot all about it.

Not until the next day, when she visited Mike Regan in his office for a very necessary conference about her affairs, did she remember it. And it was Mike, glowering, who reminded her.

"I hope you're not planning to see too much of Burnet," he said in his best it's-for-your-own-good advisory manner.

"Now, Mike, let's not be proprietory," she told him. "I'm a big girl now and I can pick my own wolves—it says here."

"I take it you've picked Alan," he said savagely.

"Is that any of your concern?" she countered a bit unfairly. Then, because she was not cruel and was fond of him, "Why, Mike? Is there something I should know about him?" This because she was also feminine and neither incurious nor fond of making any move which might put such security as she had in jeopardy.

Mike poked moodily at an envelope on his blotter. "I guess not," he admitted grudgingly. "I guess it's more because of what I *don't* know where Alan is concerned."

"Who is he, Mike?" she asked then. "Why haven't I met him before? He seems to know his way around our part of the world."

"You haven't been around much the last few years, remember?" Mike shook his head. "Alan Burnet popped up literally out of nowhere two, three years ago. Beyond that—nothing."

"What do you mean—nothing?" she asked, curious.

"Just that," said Mike. "I'm not the only one who has tried to have him checked—you'll see why in a minute. He appeared and that was that. There weren't—and aren't—any records. He was here, on the scene, that was all. It was a little eerie."

"How did you happen to meet him, Mike?" she asked.

"He came in to see me, that's all," said Mike half-defiantly as if confessing to something wrong. "He wanted me to see to it that he didn't stumble into any pitfalls purchasing some stock. I took care of the deal for him—and since then I've handled the legal end of his affairs."

"What was he like then?" Dee wanted to know.

"Why—about the way he is now. Sure of himself. I don't think he had much money then. He told me the thousand he handed over was his total savings." Mike laughed with a tinge of bitterness. "He wanted me to buy some shares in Black Silvermine. It was off the list then—worth exactly ten cents per share."

"Mike—you didn't let him?" she said anxiously.

"Hah!" Mike was ironic. "I tried but he was not taking no for an answer. His money, less fees and commissions, bought him upwards of nine thousand shares. One week later we got word that uranium had been discovered in the Black Silvermine. The A.E.C. bought up the stock within a month. They paid twenty-four dollars per share."

"Good heavens!" said Dee, doing some mental arithmetic. "That means he must have made about a quarter of a million on the deal."

"Just about," said Mike unhappily. He hesitated, added, "I ran into a man who lived out there—he had never seen nor heard of Alan around the Black Silvermine. And not even the prospectors knew they had struck it rich until the ore was assayed—three days *after* Alan bought the stock.

"It doesn't seem—well, quite reasonable," said Dee. "He must have known something."

"Maybe," said Mike unhappily. "But that's only the starter. Take the last election. He put down a wad on Truman—I don't know how much but it was plenty—when things looked blackest for him. He hasn't missed a pennant winner or a Derby winner since. Honestly, Dee, it simply isn't human."

"He's just lucky," said Dee, hoping she was right.

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SHE was very aware of the strangeness about Alan just then—aware and a little afraid and wholly fascinated.

"Sure—lucky!" said Mike. "But if you were ever with him when he scored one of these coups you'd wonder what he got out of it. He always seems to want to lose."

"Strange," said Dee, recalling how unpleased Alan had been over his win at Belmont the day before. "I wonder why?"

"A fellow with his luck can afford to be a bit cracked," said Mike bitterly. "Now, about this husband of yours, Dee. We've got word he's coming back to New York to ask for a cut in his alimony. He claims he can't afford to pay it."

"I don't want to be unfair," said Dee, to whom both husband and alimony were distasteful subjects. "If Chuck can't afford it—"

"Can't afford it!" exploded Mike angrily. "Your ex-souse—sorry, I mean spouse—has just come into another trust fund. His Uncle Joe died in Mexico City last month. He's just trying to get out of his responsibility. After all, *he* was the one who did the playing around. *He* was the one who wanted the divorce. You had nothing whatever to do with it."

"I'm not so sure," said Dee a little dreamily. "After all, if I had handled him a bit more sympathetically—he was really just a big spoiled overgrown kid."

"*Women!*" cried Mike, raising eyes and hands to the ceiling. Then he sighed, counted ten almost visibly and smiled wanly at her. "Dee, honey," he said, "how about dinner tonight?"

"I'm sorry," she told him, "but I have a date."

"With Alan Burnet?" Mike's eyebrows were lifted curiously.

"With Alan Burnet," she told him, then leaned across the desk to touch his wrist with a gloved finger. "I'm terribly sorry, Mike, but this is the way it is. It's better than pretending a thing I don't feel. I wish it were different but—"

"So do I," Mike sighed, managed a grin. "But look out for that spoiled overgrown ex-baby of yours. I'm not actually sure why he's coming back to New York. Maybe he wants to remarry you."

"That," she said crisply, rising from her chair, "is out. So long, Mike—and, thanks for everything."

"Oh, sure—so long," said Mike in open self-derision.

Alan, in his foolish and costly little roadster, was waiting for her outside. She had told him about her appointment with Mike. At sight of his smile, at the touch of his hand on her arm, the vague misgivings she had felt upstairs about him vanished. She repressed a desire to say, "Oh, Alan!" softly and got into the car. From that moment she knew she was sunk without trace.

"We're going for a sail," he told her. "I have a little S-boat at Sands Point. It ought to be fun."

"It sounds lovely, Alan," she told him, squinting up at the bright blue of the sky. "But I'll have to go home and get some things first."

He kissed her when they were in her Beekman Place apartment and it took them quite awhile to get started for

[*Turn page*]

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Long Island. At one point the telephone rang but Alan simply lifted it from its cradle, leaving it to buzz its complaints unheard.

The sun was hazy in a metallic sky when they finally got out on the water but neither of them cared. They cruised the sound in the little sailboat, reveling in the freshness of the salt air, in the gentle clop-clop of the water against the hull, in the sweep of white canvas, in each other's nearness. They didn't talk much—they didn't have to.

The squall caught them unaware. One moment the air was still and the water smooth as an oil-slick. The next the sky was dark, the waves crashing on deck and cockpit as if seeking to engulf and devour the little sailboat. Terrified, Dee crouched in a corner of the rocking vessel while Alan coolly brought her through.

"We'll be all right," he told her and there was unhappiness in his voice as he shouted the words. He pulled savagely at the halyards after locking the tiller, still graceful as he held his balance on that precariously tilting deck. Even then, in her terror, she wondered a little why he should be unhappy in his confidence that they were not going to drown.

The wind gave a final furious blow and their mainsail was rent to shreds. Somehow Alan lowered the tattered canvas and they rocked less violently, powered only by the jib. The waters were growing calmer, the air, which had cooled, grew warm again.

"We'll be lucky to get back to the Point," said Alan somberly, rejoining her in the cockpit. "I'll bring her in wherever I can and we'll find a phone and call the club. Oh-oh!"

"What's wrong, darling?" Dee asked him.

"Fog," he told her briefly. "This damned freak weather." But he grinned at her reassuringly. She snuggled close to his wet body, not caring at the moment that she must look like a drowned rat. She felt almost worship for him—for the coolness with which he had brought them through the storm.

LONG ISLAND became shadowy and vanished as fog and night wrapped them doubly. In a little while the only sentient thing around them was the slop-slop of water against the hull. It was like being wrapped in a vacuum. They sat still there for more than an hour, waiting for something to show.

"I've got to get you out of this," he told her finally, removing his arm from about her. His voice was oddly unsteady.

"Don't hurry, darling," Dee said, putting a restraining hand on his wet sleeve. "It's bound to lift sometime. And don't worry. I'm perfectly happy here alone with you."

"Sweet!" There was reassurance in the pressure of his fingers on her shoulder. "But if I can rig the flashlight . . ."

"To see through this?" She gestured at the fog about them, all but lost sight of her own hand in the process.

He said nothing, fumbled his way forward in the cockpit to the small emergency locker. She heard him grunt and mutter something, then caught the faint flare of his cigarette lighter. It reflected light briefly from the cylindrical tube of a flashlight.

Moments later a brilliant shaft of light cut through the fog like a drill, widening but not losing brightness as it progressed. Where it was, the fog simply wasn't. Alan lifted the beam until the shore of Long Island lay revealed a half mile or so away. He murmured something to himself, then came back to the tiller. They inched their way slowly via jib-power toward shore.

At last they reached a cove with a rotting wharf. Rickety wooden stairs led to a shuttered Charles Addams sort of house atop a low bluff. Alan moored the sloop to the wharf and held her fiercely for a long moment, his lips hard on hers.

"Stay here," he told her. "I'm going to find a phone and get help. You'll be all right."

"I want to come with you," she said.

"No—the going may be rough and I don't want to worry about you, honey. I can make it quicker alone."

"Okay, Alan," she said with a submissiveness hitherto alien to her nature.

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He kissed her again, saltily, and was gone. She sat down in the cockpit and managed finally to get a damp cigarette going. At least, she thought, Alan hadn't guessed right on their sail. He had not foreseen the storm. It gave her an odd sense of relief. The idea of a man who knew everything was frightening.

How long she sat there she did not know but she smoked four moist cigarettes before she heard the clop-clop of water against the bottom of another vessel. She picked up the flashlight Alan had left with her, swung it in the direction of the sound and pushed the little button on its metallic side.

"Hey—shut that off! Do you want to blind me?" shouted a rasping, too-familiar voice. She obeyed numbly, unable to believe the evidence of her eyes. It was Chuck Lord, her ex-husband, sailing alone in a Brutal Beast. Moments later he was alongside the S-boat, making fast with a painter.

"What *was* that thing you flashed at me?" he asked querulously in his yes-I've-been-drunk-but-now-I'm-sober-and-what-about-it? tone. I spotted it in the fog and was able to follow you in." He saw Dee then, blinked, said, "Oh, it *is* you. Where's whozis?"

"If you mean Alan Burnet, he has gone to get help," she said with all the haughtiness her damp condition would admit. She wished Chuck were drunk. When he was sober he was smart—too smart.

"All alone and no telephone," he said, grinning at her. Then, "Let's have a look at that light."

"It's just a stepped-up flashlight," she told him, glad to tell him anything that would keep the talk from personal subjects.

"Just a stepped-up—my *foot!*" He took the light from her nerveless fingers, studied it, pointed it out over the water, pushed the button. On the horizon the Connecticut shore line was clearly visible in the circle of brilliant light.

"Frau that used to be mine," Chuck Lord said softly, "I was all ready to be a nuisance. "I was tired of paying that alimony check every three months —and getting nothing in return. I was going to put the screws on but good."

"How did you get here?" Dee asked. She had huddled herself protectively into a ball, like a spineless porcupine or an armadillo, in the furthest corner of the cockpit.

"Partly luck." He laughed, still studying the lamp in his hand. "I called your apartment this morning and you took the phone off the hook. So I went over there and waited and followed. I managed to rent me a boat—of sorts. I lost you lovebirds in the fog, of course, but this light brought me back on the beam." He put it on, peered at it in the reflection of its own light. For an instant it shone in Dee's eyes and she cried out in pain. It was like looking directly into the sun.

"Quite a gadget—who made it?" Chuck asked her casually.

"Alan put it together," she said, then wished she hadn't. Her Ex was showing much too much interest in the light.

"I'd like to meet him some time," said Chuck. "As I said, I was ready to kick up a stink—but maybe I won't. I'll make a deal. Let me take this light and I'll lay off. Okay?"

"But it's not mine," said Dee, relieved and fearful at once.

"That's right," he said mockingly. "Possession is nine points of the law, I believe. Well, here—I'll give you this." He tossed another flashlight into the S-boat cockpit, began unfastening the painter. "So long—darling. Happy alimony."

PERHAPS half an hour later she heard footsteps on the wooden stairs of the bluff. It was Alan and she clung to him, happy and afraid at once, crying a little against his shoulder.

"Hey!" he said, holding her off from him. "What gives? I wasn't gone *that* long. They're sending over a car from the Point."

"Oh, darling, I'm so *glad* you're back," she cried.

"Well, so am I," he told her. He lit them cigarettes, said, "Let's have that flashlight. I want to set it at normal."

"It *is* normal," she said, not wanting

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to talk about Chuck and his swap. "It went back to normal just a few minutes ago. Alan, I don't like to seem inquisitive, but what did you do to it?"

"It went back!" he exclaimed, running a hand over his forehead and staring at her. "You're *sure* of it?"

"See for yourself," she told him. He picked up the flashlight from beside her, tried it, tried it again.

"Good Lord!" he cried. "It can't be! It simply can't be."

"Is something wrong?" Dee asked him.

"*No!*" he shouted, grabbing her close to him and hugging her madly. "Everything's wonderful." He kissed her until she struggled clear of him in near-exasperation.

"Alan Burnet," she said, "if you don't tell me what—"

"Okay," he told her. "I can tell you now, darling. But you must promise not to tell anyone about it—not anyone."

"I'll be good," she said meekly and meant it. Something in his tone told her he wasn't kidding.

"I pulled a switch in the batteries of that flash that released atomic power," he told her. "It should have held its light for two hundred years—in *my* world at any rate. And it didn't."

"What do you mean, Alan—'*your* world?'" she asked him, a sudden cold chill settling around her heart.

"I'm the one who got away," he told her grimly. "My world was wiped out by indiscriminate use of atomic power in nineteen sixty-two, darling. No, I'm not crazy. I can prove it."

From a pocket in his shirt he brought out a water-proof package, opened it. Under the dim glow of the flashlight they could see its contents clearly enough. There was money there, lots of it, in crisp thousand-dollar bills—all of them dated in the late nineteen fifties. There were newspaper clippings and an almanac, all of them placed in the future. There were a few other little gadgets whose nature Dee did not know.

"I saw the explosion coming," said Alan. "I was a scientist and, like others, I sought a way out. There were space expeditions planned, even time travel. Me, I sought a parallel time track—an Earth in a universe whose future was dissimilar to that of the doomed Earth on which I was stuck.

"I found it," he told her exultantly. "I know how old man Archimedes felt when he shouted, 'Eureka!' No, honey, I'm sane."

"But, Alan," said Dee, frowning at the almanac and trying to comprehend what she had just been told, "this is only nineteen fifty. How can you be sure you're not on the same Earth?"

"That's what has had me terrified," he told her. "Every time I found a prediction fulfilled, every time I won a bet or a stock market play, I felt increasingly trapped. Perhaps, I thought I had merely gone backwards in time instead of across it. But not any more, darling, not any more."

"Why not, dear?" she countered.

"Because of you," he told her exultantly. "You and the flashlight. You've broken the chain. We're safe—see?" He turned the now-dull beam on the almanac, riffled through to a certain page, put it into her hands. "Read that, honey, read it."

"It" was a brief chronology of important and interesting events, year by year, in the world from which Alan had come. Dee looked at it, saw the entry 1950, read—

. . . first cheap and widespread use of atomic power obtained through suit brought by woman non-scientist against ex-husband she claimed had stolen it. Irene Deering greatest name in science since Madame Curie. . . . St. Louis Cardinals won the World . . .

"You see, honey?" said Alan. "That's how the whole horror began. The fools thought it was progress—it was ruin, a cancer for the Earth. There was more to it than that, of course. It all ran according to Hoyle right up to this flashlight failing." He grinned and tapped it fondly. "Good old failure," he said. He looked at her fondly and chuckled, "It's a good thing I made hay while I could, honey, or we'd be poor as churchmice."

"Yes, it's swell, darling," said Irene Deering ("Dee") Lord, wondering how she could recover that flashlight. The courts. . . .

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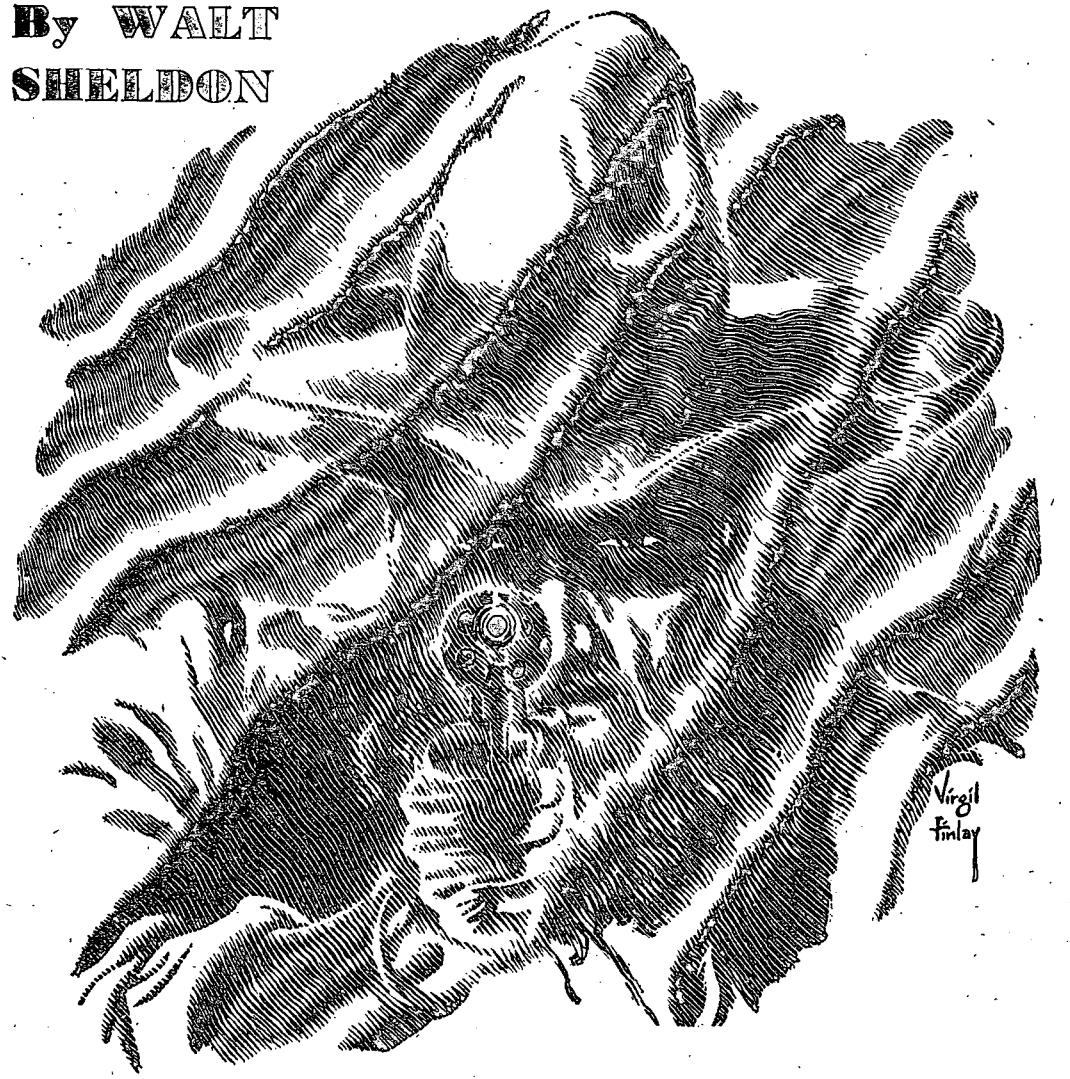
By WALT SHELDON



REPLICA

THE visitor was gaunt, and obviously another screwball but a note from Mr. Gamble's brother-in-law had brought him here and Mr. Gamble couldn't very well just have him tossed out. He glanced at the note again to remind himself of the man's name. Passmore—Dr. Nicholas Passmore.

"Look," said Mr. Gamble, napkining some breakfast egg away from his plump jowls, "in this movie business I get screwballs every day. Mr. Passmore—why can't I just be let alone so I can finish this here picture we're making?"

Passmore ran his hand over tarnished white hair. He said, "It's not as though

Time travel comes to the aid of a harried director of Western movies—but not in the way that he plans it!

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I were another crackpot. I've showed you my references, my degrees, the clippings from the science journals."

"All right, all right." Mr. Gamble's tone was impatient. He glanced up from the breakfast nook and through the broad, plate-glass picture window. This window had been specially installed in the pre-fabricated electrified air-conditioned cottage in which Mr. Gamble was roughing it on location. Outside he could see the set for *Trigger Tom*—the wonderful and perfect set which was an absolute replica of Broken Fork, Arizona, in the Eighties.

Mr. Gamble said, "Already I'm behind schedule with this picture. So I don't care how interesting this time travel of yours is. Or whatever you call it. I'm an artist, Mr. Passmore. When I am doing something I don't want to think of anything else it should distract me from that something."

"But that's the point," said Passmore in a thin harried way. "You've wasted so much time already on historical research! Think what it would mean actually to visit the place and time of Trigger Dorgan's demise!"

Mr. Gamble took his head by the temples. "I *am* thinking. I'm thinking what a putrid scene that death scene is anyway. It's anticlimactic, superfluous, irrelevant—and it reeks. Look, I don't care if it really happened that way or not. I know a story when I see one. But what am I? A plain Executive Producer and Director. Charters is a *Vice-President* Executive Producer. He says the scene stays in. He's ruining me."

Passmore appeared not to hear Gamble's complaints. He put his bony hands on the breakfast table, leaned close and spoke earnestly. "But I know time travel will work, Mr. Gamble. I've checked it all carefully. Except that I need a replica of the place we visit—such as your set. That's because of the Optimum Condition factor."

"Look—some other time. Please!" said Mr. Gamble."

"Surely you can understand my principles of time travel and see that they work." Passmore sat down and leaned toward Mr. Gamble. There was scientific fire in his eye. "You've heard of theoretically traveling faster than light, then looking back into your own past—right?"

"What?" Mr. Gamble cocked his head. Then he shook it.

Mr. Gamble wondered if he'd ever really get used to the screwballs you met in this business. He had come to Hollywood heralded as Europe's greatest producer of musicals. The kind with hussars, tinkling chandeliers, blond chambermaids and plenty of schmaltz in three-quarter time. To date Mr. Jonathan Gamble had produced westerns, detectives, semi-type documentaries, family pictures, epics— In short, everything but a musical.

PASSMORE went on—inexorably. "Mr. Gamble, my time travel is based on the idea of such speed. Except that the subject doesn't actually move in space—not as we conceive of movement. In effect he works from the other side of the equation. You remember Newton's second law of motion."

"I never studied law," said Mr. Gamble.

"Force equals Mass times Acceleration," said Passmore, pounding the breakfast nook with a curled, bony fist. "Very well. Turn it around. Acceleration equals Mass over Force. We alter the mass of the subject through atomic apposition—my own principle. We establish force—*stationary* force—in the form of energy or heat. What happens?"

"All right, what happens?" Mr. Gamble's voice was weary, resigned. "Another big word happens. Go ahead—tell me the other big word."

Passmore spread his hands triumphantly. "We have a rate of change to velocity—acceleration—without actual traverse of *space*. What is left to traverse?" He paused, leaned forward. "*Time*."

"Clear as mud," said Mr. Gamble.

"Of course I've oversimplified vastly," continued Passmore, stroking his faded white hair again. "The factors involved run into the thousands. Some I don't

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even understand—except pragmatically. Optimum Condition, for instance. To get back to a certain place, at a certain time, it is necessary first to reproduce all of the surrounding physical conditions as accurately as possible. I haven't had time to eliminate and find which ones really matter."

"If you will excuse me, Mr. Passmore," said Mr. Gamble, gulping the last of his coffee.

And he left Nicholas Passmore there in the cottage, left him looking uncomfortable, self-conscious and disappointed. He shrugged. One of his brother-in-law's friends. Oh well—some other time it might be interesting to see what this time travel business was all about. Maybe go back to Vienna, 1925, and do another musical.

Mr. Gamble sighed and stepped into the hot desert sun. Later he'd think of a way to get rid of this Passmore.

The company was ready to shoot. Mr. Gamble took his place in a canvas chair under a striped sun umbrella, and took the sheaf the script girl handed him. He glanced at Eddie Usaki, the cameraman and Eddie said, "Any time."

Mr. Gamble turned to the actors. Howard Heyworth, who played the part of the famous outlaw, Trigger Tom, was getting his last touch of suntan powder from the make-up man. He looked and talked the part of Tom Dorgan certainly—big, iron-jawed, handsome and tough in a chivalrous tender way. He might go far if only dopes like Charters, the *Vice-President* Executive Producer would stop lousing up his pictures with such irrelevant things as this death scene.

"All right," Mr. Gamble said to everybody in the quiet pleasant voice he assumed when directing. "We went through it all yesterday and even tried some takes. So let's do it *right* today. Remember—this is costing a thousand dollars a minute."

Everyone nodded gravely. No one asked Mr. Gamble why he made these little speeches at a thousand dollars a minute.

"Now," said Mr. Gamble, "to recap the scene, Tom Dorgan, after rising from outlaw to peace officer has become an outlaw again. Another outlaw, Laredo King, is looking for him. So the town figures the two outlaws will kill each other [illegible] extras—you townspeople to show that. You got to look anxious and half-pleased—only also a little scared at the same time. You understand that?"

Everybody understood. Or nodded as though he did.

"Check. So let's try it now for long and medium shots," said Mr. Gamble.

Movement. Soft babble. Assistants scurrying, dollies wheeling in, out; booms swinging. Eddie Usaki yelling and gesturing. "No—you can't boom out that far! I'm behind Trigger Tom for a travel shot—you'll catch my shadow!"

Yes, sir. Yes, Mr. Usaki. Yes, Mr. Gamble. Yes, yes, yes indeed. Okay.

Quiet.

The long main street of Broken Fork, yellow in the sun—the shadows on the porch of the Gran Quivira Hotel and Saloon, purple and sharply defined. Burr-maned cow-horses at a rail. Only their tails moving, switching at flies. Heads from windows, from around corners, from behind water barrels.

And then into the quiet, the jingle of spurs.

Trigger Tom Dorgan, the outlaw, always wore long spurs and jinglers. That was his trade mark. The sound came in soft rhythm along the board side-walk—clink, clink, clink—steady steps. There was a close-up of those marching spurs already in the can—that would be cut-in later.

NOW Tom Dorgan stepped into the dusty street and Eddie Usaki's camera swung behind to follow him.

Laredo King appeared—the other outlaw—big, black-bearded, rolling in his gait. The extras babbled to each other, they widened their eyes and reacted and Camera 3 panned across a line of them at the rail of the Gran Quivira.

Mr. Gamble, in his deck chair, shook his head quietly and sadly. It smelled.

"It smells," said a voice behind Mr. Gamble.

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He whirled, startled. Richard V. Charters, Vice-president Executive Producer stood there. A tall man with a guard's mustache and a cropped head, he wore a navy-blue gabardine double-breasted drape, white shirt and a dark tie. Here in the desert heat he looked not a whit less sartorial than he did in his office-cottage back on the lot.

"All right, cut!" yelled Mr. Gamble, waving at the company. He turned and glared at Charters. "So you ruined that scene," he said.

Charters shrugged. "It was rotten anyway, old boy. Don't know why you can't do the death scene, Johnathan. It's really the backbone of the picture. I helped write it myself."

"Mr. Charters," said Gamble, from behind a slow boil, "as I have told you innumerable times, that death scene is—"

"Yes, I know. Anticlimactic, superfluous, irrelevant and it reeks. That's your opinion, Jonathan. Could it possibly be that you're directing it badly simply because you don't like it?"

Gamble tightened his lips and didn't say anything.

"Or perhaps you're losing your touch," said Charters coldly. "That happens, you know. Older chap—set in your ways. Not that I don't like you personally, Jonathan, please don't misunderstand me."

Mr. Gamble didn't misunderstand him, not in the slightest. Charters had a younger brother, a Playhouse kid with a lot of ideas about art and so forth. He wanted to put the kid into Mr. Gamble's place. Charters would lose no chance to make Gamble look bad.

So Gamble glared at the Vice-president Executive Producer for awhile and then he turned back slowly and called to everybody, "Let's try it again." His voice was sad and weary.

He tried all day to get the scene right. He went into long conferences with Eddie Usaki and personally checked all the camera angles. He had exhaustive talks with the actors. He moved the reflectors about, trying to achieve mood through light—he even went through the actors' paces, demonstrating every step, every facial twist.

Charters, saturnine and silent, stood to one side through all of it. He made Mr. Gamble nervous enough to have torn his hair if he had had any.

Quitting time came. It still smelled.

In his cottage that evening, Mr. Gamble dined without taste on whitefish, red caviar, french-fried potatoes and a glass of imported Chablis made into a highball with seltzer water. The Hollywood touch. Back in the old days Mr. Gamble used to sip his Chablis plain, relish its bouquet. He was in the middle of his meal when Dr. Nicholas Passmore showed up again.

The gaunt scientist sat down, uninvited, across from Mr. Gamble and picked idly at the french-fries. Mr. Gamble had the odd feeling of Fate walking into the room.

"Look," said Mr. Gamble, "I thought you went back to Los Angeles."

"No. I decided to stay awhile. I took a room in the tourist court down the road. Had to take another room for my equipment. You see, I've gone to so much trouble to get here, to have my apparatus shipped that—well—I just didn't want to give up so soon."

Mr. Gamble, through a mouthful of whitefish, said, "Passmore, why don't you listen to *my* troubles for a change?"

Passmore blinked. "Why, largely because they're unimportant compared to mine, I suppose."

Mr. Gamble made a disgusted growl. He sipped his wine highball again.

"The scientific method," said Passmore, out of his usual clear sky, "is to eliminate all irrelevant factors one by one."

Passmore droned on, then, but Mr. Gamble scarcely heard him. He was trying to apply his own kind of scientific method to his own particular problem. How Charters was out to get him. How Charters had insisted on that death scene, knowing it would hurt Mr. Gamble's reputation.

The picture—well, the public would swallow it because it was a good enough Western and it starred Howard Hey-

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worth. But in the industry itself—on studio walks, in the trade columns, over starched linen at the Derby—that was where the damage would be done. With scalpels. "To bad about old Gamble—personally I like him; he's a nice fella, y'understand—but that last stinker. Oh, brother!"

AND it all went back to that one irrelevant death scene. Out of key, entirely out of key with the rest. Why couldn't this outlaw, Trigger Tom Dorgan, have faded into obscurity after saving the cavalry from the Indians?

That was his real true climax. Why did he have to go get himself killed by some schtoop in Broken Fork, Arizona, May 18, 1881, at three o'clock in the afternoon? The guy didn't know how to live his own life artistically, that was the trouble.

Dr. Nicholas Passmore, meanwhile, was saying to Mr. Gamble: "So that's the curious paradox of time travel. If you go back in time—by definition you alter historical events. To a degree—your own existence is the result of what has gone before. Do you then alter your own life? This, Mr. Gamble, is the question that could be answered for science if you would cooperate with me."

Mr. Gamble looked up, and a thoughtful frown came over his forehead.

"You understand," continued Passmore, "that I haven't sufficient data to interest a foundation or another group of scientists. Not to the extent of backing me. I have only my own convictions. But think of the glory in it for you, Mr. Gamble. I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll name the principle of Atomic Apposition after you. We'll call it the Gamble effect."

Gamble's frown became deeper, even more thoughtful. "Wait a minute," he said slowly, "what is this you are saying in the biggest possible words about altering events?"

"The paradox of time travel," said Passmore. "What actually happens, for instance, if we go back and rescue Napoleon a second time from exile? If we return—do we find history changed in the very history books?"

"History changed," said Mr. Gamble just a bit hollowly. He raised his eyes and looked into the air above Passmore's head.

"Is there perhaps another plane of existence," said Passmore, "where Napoleon *did* escape a second time, and reconquer? Where today the United States is part of the French Empire? Are there perhaps infinite planes of existence in which every permutation of events exists? Is time-travel merely another expression of travel across these planes of probability?"

Mr. Gamble was still thinking. He thought for a long silent moment. Finally he looked up and now his voice was suddenly friendly to the lean scientist. "Mr. Passmore," he said in the manner of a foreign minister opening negotiations, "have some whitefish with your potatoes."

* * * * *

It was four o'clock in the morning before Mr. Jonathan Gamble and Dr. Nicholas Passmore really got to it. In the first place the preparations had taken a long time and in the second place the set of Trigger Tom was completely deserted at that hour. Mr. Gamble had even sent the watchman away.

Passmore's time traveler stood in the middle of the dusty street of the set. Moonlight glittered on its metal edging, on knobs and dial-facings. It was about the size of a 250-watt broadcast transmitter and its accompanying amplifying stages.

It had been brought from the tourist court in a studio truck, unloaded and the hands dismissed after signing their overtime slips. In the little shack, just beyond the set, a portable generator thrummed and a snaking length of cable ran from it to the time traveler.

Passmore was intense and intent as he worked on the settings. He carried a clip-board, pencil, slide-rule and table of logs, and he made siwft calculations between each setting of dial and vernier. "It's all exquisitely critical," he explained to Gamble. "A change in one

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factor shows up squared or cubed, or even to the tenth power in another. For instance—we want to get to Broken Fork, Arizona, May Eighteen, Eighteen Eighty-one, at a quarter to three P.M. The real site of Broken Fork is exactly one-hundred seventy-six and four tenths miles from here.

"If I don't get that distance correctly we may find ourselves off not in distance—but in *time*. By the same token time must be correct—or we might end up in Milwaukee instead of Broken Fork. You see how it's all interrelated? This is the philosophical expression of curvature in physical space."

"Sure, naturally," said Mr. Gamble, with just the right inoffensive touch of sarcasm.

MR. GAMBLE was dressed in old western clothes and so was Passmore. They had decided they'd be less conspicuous in the real Broken Fork if they showed up in the costume of that day.

Mr. Gamble, besides a large hat, tight frontier pants and jack-boots, wore also a .44 caliber pistol strapped low to his thigh. It was not loaded with its usual blanks. The prop crew had been potting jackrabbits for sport out here on the desert and Mr. Gamble had obtained real cartridges. They were part of his scheme.

"One point one five one six dynes per astral minute," muttered Mr. Passmore, setting the power scale.

Mr. Gamble fidgeted and looked at the moon and the desert and the night and said, "You're sure we get back, now?"

"Automatically," said Passmore, nodding. "The force works on an exponential curve. Except that it's quite flat on top. During the flattening of the curve we will be back in time for exactly fourteen minutes. After the curve falls and we return—we merely disappear and materialize back here."

"I hope so," said Mr. Gamble.

"All things being equal you can depend on it," said Passmore.

Sharply, Mr. Gamble said, "What do you mean—all things being equal?"

Passmore shrugged. "Human fallibility. A slight mistake somewhere in the settings. A flaw in my theory. But that's not likely. And anyway there's always a slight element of chance in any undertaking."

Mr. Gamble didn't say anything. He was wondering whether he would have entered into this affair without his desperate need to foil Mr. Richard V. Charters' plans. He was also wondering if maybe this Passmore wasn't just another crackpot in spite of his degrees and everything.

Passmore adjusted the square grills that faced the area like radar antennae. He beckoned for Mr. Gamble to stand beside him in the glare of these grills and Mr. Gamble complied. He shrugged and complied and plunged into all of it with a kind of dazed courage.

The scientist glanced at an electronic clock on the instrument panel. He glanced at Mr. Gamble. "Ready?"

"Uh—I wonder if it's really going to work," said Mr. Gamble. The back of his neck prickled. "I mean—is it really absolutely safe, like you say?"

"Breathe deeply," said Mr. Passmore. "Hold it."

He threw a switch. At first Mr. Gamble could scarcely realize what was happening—even though he had expected *something*. It was like going under ether. Everything swirled and was very unreal, and one part of his mind knew that there was unconsciousness, but another part was content and amiably curious.

A kind of dream existence—his vision was as vision under water—or maybe it was gelatin, not water, because now it seemed to be melting away in front of his eyes so that twisted and distorted shapes fell into recognizable forms.

Mr. Jonathan Gamble found himself in an alley between the Gran Qivira Hotel and Saloon and Metcalfe's livery and Feed Stable in Broken Fork, Arizona.

It was daytime. There was no calendar in sight, but somehow he knew very well that it was May 18, 1881. He looked at his wrist watch. Four thirty-

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two, it said—it still showed the time they had left the desert set for *Trigger Tom*. That was what his watch said but he looked about him at the dust and at the sun and knew very well that it was really 2:45 p.m. or thereabouts. His instinct or something akin to it knew all this.

Passmore spoke and there was in his voice a tingling boyishness which his ordinarily lean somber manner couldn't quite hide. He said, "Well, here we are!"

And so they were—unencumbered, dressed in the dress of the period and to all appearances established citizens of Broken Fork. They moved cautiously from the alley to the main street.

Again it was a matter of feeling. The silence, the live, quivering silence in Broken Fork—the first shock of it hit Mr. Gamble for a moment and then the artist in him came to the fore. He began to wonder how this taut ominous mood was achieved.

This was exactly the kind of thing he had unsuccessfully been trying to put into the death scene of *Trigger Tom*.

There was a soft clicking beside him, and he looked to see Passmore taking snaps with a miniature camera. He frowned once more at the street. That elusive portentousness—was it in the hot sun—the shadows? Was it in the lean squat of the weathered shacks—the looming of their façades—the dust curling from the street—the twitching of a horse's flank?

Mr. Gamble knew this. Mr. Gamble knew that something in Broken Fork said Death was coming.

HE watched the people. They moved about in their accustomed ways, it seemed to him. Through a half-open door and a distorting window he saw a barber shaving someone. A woman and her small daughter turning into a dry-goods store. A tall man in a black jim-cracker coat thoughtfully scraped the ash of a used cigar on a porch rail. A freckled kid in a linsey-woolsey shirt gathered up his marbles near the corner of the livery stable.

It was not really silence—just the sense of it. A lowering by a decibel or so of the ordinary sounds of the afternoon.

Mr. Gamble knew how this scene should be done. His mistake had been in using all of the conventional devices to show it—panning along strained quiet faces, fooling with moody artificial light, making the actors act. He had forgotten for a while the honesty and sincerity of portrayal that had always made his musicals more than bagatelles.

And now he heard the soft jingling of spurs.

"Here it comes, Gamble," said the gaunt scientist, touching his arm.

Mr. Gamble nodded. He touched the grip of the holstered revolver at his side and he was frightened. He squared his round shoulders manfully. He fought fear.

"You're all set?" whispered Passmore. "You know exactly what to do?"

Mr. Gamble nodded again—tightly, nervously.

Trigger Tom Dorgan appeared at the north end of the street to Mr. Gamble's right. Citizens began to disappear—casually rather than suddenly. Here and there a few faces could be seen peering from doors and windows. Mr. Gamble studied the famous outlaw as he came.

Dorgan wasn't anything like big handsome Howard Heyworth who, in the Twentieth Century, portrayed him. He was runty. His blond hair was dirty, unkempt and it spilled forward from a battered grimy felt hat quite unlike Heyworth's sweeping Stetson. He came closer and Mr. Gamble saw that he had pimples and pock-marks all over his face.

Now his eyes were close enough to see. They were narrow and yellow and stupid and, Mr. Gamble felt, the cruelest eyes he had ever regarded. This was the man Mr. Gamble planned on saving from death.

"Here comes Laredo King," whispered Passmore. His camera began to click again.

Mr. Gamble switched his stare to the left. Laredo King in real life was more like his movie counterpart than Dorgan was. King was big and black-bearded

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and filthy. Tob[illegible]o stain dribbled from each corner o[illegible]is mouth and his jaws worked fur[illegible]ly upon a quid. Good touch—Mr[illegible]amble would have to remember t[illegible].

The [illegible] outlaws—now perhaps seventy [illegible] yards apart—moved toward each o[illegible] slowly. They looked at nothing el[illegible]ut each other. They kept their right hands hooked, poised, near their holstered pistols.

Now, except for the jingling spurs, it was truly silent. Mr. Gamble liked that—the sudden real silence that followed the first dazed hush.

"If we solve the paradox of time travel," Passmore whispered, "it will advance both science and philosophy centuries. I hardly dare dream what comes next. Where it will lead to—" His voice was hollow. His eyes had the next thing to a fanatical gleam.

Now Trigger Tom and Laredo were fifty yards apart. Forty—thirty—still walking forward—still eyeing each other. Laredo was very somber, working his cud. Trigger Tom wore a moronic half-smile across his ugly face.

Mr. Gamble looked at his watch. Then he looked up at Passmore. Passmore checked his own watch. The two outlaws were now twenty-five yards apart.

"Now?" asked Mr. Gamble.

"Now," said Passmore quietly.

Mr. Gamble was not in the physical sense a courageous man. But now he found courage. Enough courage—just enough to do what he had to do. His entire career, all of his happiness and the only thing really important to him—the worth of his work—depended on this brief action of his and on a little luck in its outcome. So he found courage for it.

He stepped forward into the street. He stepped almost directly between Laredo King and Trigger Tom and he kept looking back and forth at each of them. At the top of his lungs he roared, "Phonies! Cheap crooks! You couldn't hit a barn door—either of you! So pfui to both of you! You hear me—*Pfui!*"

Both Laredo King and Trigger Tom stared in profoundest surprise. It had been silent before in Broken Fork. Now it was as though the entire town, animated, had drawn a sharp startled breath. The two outlaws raised their brows, opened very wide their eyes and straightened themselves.

Mr. Gamble glanced nervously at his wrist watch. He ought to start to disappear about now.

He looked up again. He felt his heart thunder at his ribs and he prayed a kind of prayer that his absolute inner fright wouldn't affect his voice.

"Yagh! Cowards! Loafers! *No goods!*" he said to the astonished outlaws. "You want to fight somebody? Fight me! I'll take you on both at once!"

STILL they stared back in amazement. Simply stared. Laredo King began to shake his black beard slowly back and forth. Trigger Tom's blotched face was frozen and ugly.

Mr. Gamble consulted his watch once more. And this time he frowned with all the plump fullness of his brows. It had already been fourteen minutes since they appeared in Broken Fork. His watch couldn't be wrong—it was an expensive, fine, jeweled Janisek-Feliz, Imported.

So he should be disappearing by now. The time effect should be wearing off and he should be swinging back into the future where he belonged, after confounding Laredo King and Trigger Tom completely and, he hoped, altering the outcome of their quarrel.

Only something—some little calculation perhaps—had evidently gone wrong. He was still in Broken Fork. He was still in May 18, 1881. He was still in a perfect position to be blasted from either of two sides by the guns of two of the nastiest outlaws in the Old West.

"Passmore!" he moaned in a whisper. "*Do* something!"

The gaunt scientist was frowning at his own watch. "Strange," he was saying, "I don't understand this at all. Of course, I could have made an unwitting mistake somewhere. Some of those calibrations *were* a little hard to see in the moonlight. But I don't understand it."

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"You don't *have* to understand it. *Just do something!*"

Then a deep, rolling voice sounded. They stared to the left and saw that Laredo King was addressing them from the depths of his black beard. "Little man!" he rumbled at Mr. Gamble. "Y'all jest better skootle off now, an let us he-size fellers settle this here thing!"

Mr. Gamble was encased in a solid block of anguish. He hadn't planned things this way at all. He had admitted the possibility of a slip or two—but not this complete reversal. Way he'd planned it both Laredo King and Trigger Tom were to have turned to attack him or chase him at about the time he would disappear.

Passmore was to have covered him—just in case. And he had the loaded pistol as a last, desperate defense measure. The miracle of his disappearance, he'd been sure, would astound both outlaws enough to keep them from finishing their quarrel—at least for the time being. And it would alter the circumstances, as it already had.

BUT now Mr. Gamble's plans had come to utter chaos.

A gun sounded.

It was terribly loud, that pistol shot, in the hot silence of Broken Fork. Laredo King suddenly slackened his lower jaw and the black beard dropped with it. His eyes widened until they looked like white circles chalked upon his grimy face. He swayed. Blood appeared on his chest, and then he fell forward. Heavily.

Mr. Gamble heard buzzing in his ears. His limbs became numb. He looked at his hand, saw it was dissolving out of sight—and then he knew that at last he was returning to the future.

But before Mr. Gamble disappeared completely he had time for one quick glance at Trigger Tom. The famous outlaw was blowing smoke from his gun and grinning in great and nasty satisfaction at his disposal of Laredo King.

He wasn't looking at Mr. Gamble. He hadn't noticed the disappearing act yet. But now Mr. Gamble's thoughts were joyous. He had altered events. He had made it so that Laredo King—not Trigger Tom—died this day.

So there could be no more anticlimactic, irrelevant, inartistic, which it also smelled, death scene in the picture. . . .

The first thing that Mr. Gamble and Passmore did, upon their return, of course, was to find the script of TRIGGER TOM and riffle through it. They made a beeline for Mr. Gamble's cottage after materializing on the deserted set of Broken Fork, some fifteen or sixteen minutes after leaving it.

Gamble dashed into his living room, fumbled the papers from the desk drawers and scanned everything jerkily until he found the sequence of the death scene. He stared at this for a long moment, and then suddenly looked up at Passmore. His face seemed deflated.

"No?" asked Passmore.

"No," said Mr. Gamble.

"Then—" Passmore spoke slowly, thoughtfully, dreamily. "There's one answer. We traveled not only in time, but across planes of probability. We entered an existence where Laredo King *did not* kill Trigger Tom on May 18, 1881, at three P.M." His eyes began to burn.

"That's the answer to the paradox of the time travel, then. It's impossible to move in time along the same plane of existence! My first basic principle—Passmore's Law, I'll call it."

Mr. Gamble didn't answer. Nor did he really listen. He was staring from the picture window, watching the Arizona dawn crackle like a pomegranate over the replica-set of Broken Fork.

Somewhere on another plane of existence, he was thinking, Mr. Jonathan Gamble directed his beloved operettas and moved happily in an atmosphere of tinkling chandeliers and Viennese schmaltz. And maybe in this happy plane Richard V. Charters and all like him directed two-bit westerns—probably not even as artistically as Mr. Gamble would direct that death scene when he got to it today.

Maybe that was it. Maybe that was a kind of answer to things. If nothing else the whole idea was comforting.

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The Odyssey of

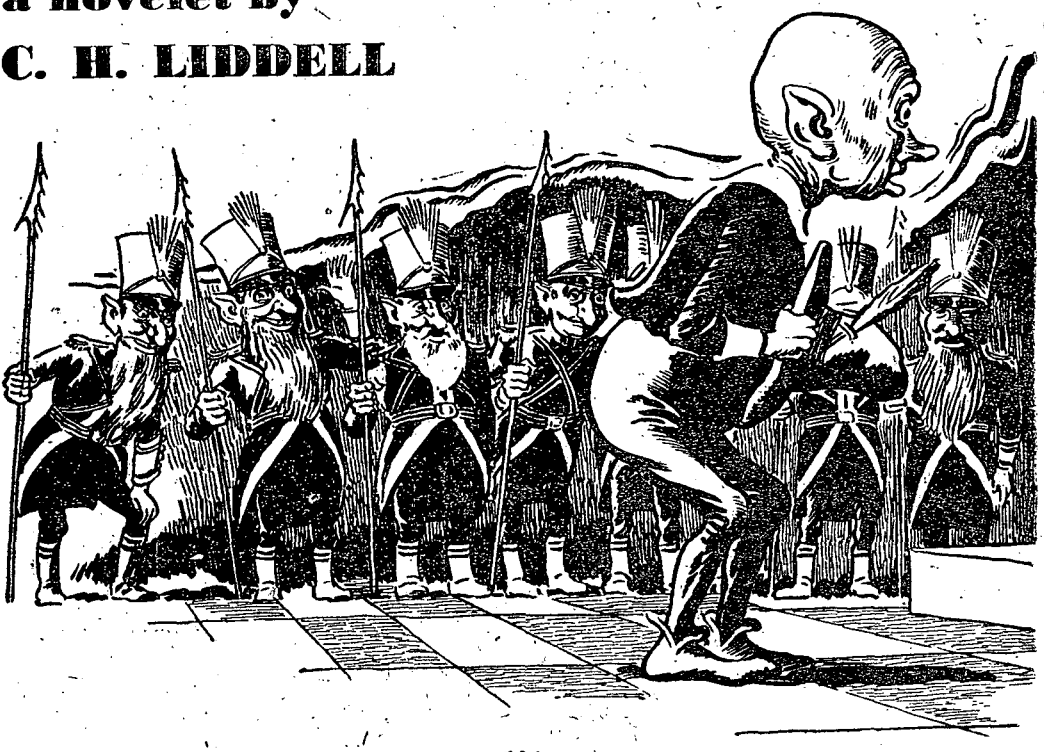
EVERY SO OFTEN—about every seven seconds, say—one of our more hide-bound readers lifts his rubescent proboscis from the volume of Euclid, Einstein, Korzybski or whatever learned authority he is reading and announces with loud and incisive accent that there is no room for fantasy in science fiction. In which, of course, he is stating the most ignoble kind of paradox.

For what is science fiction save the other side of the "if"? If all molecular movement in a given object were suddenly to go into reverse—if the elevator were to run sideways—if some Susan B. Anthony plague were to wipe out all but one of the males in the world—and so on. No matter how gadget-bound you choose to make your conception of it, science fiction is still fantasy.

All of which is by way of prelude to a story which our more nuclear-minded readers will probably insist has no place in a science fiction magazine. And for all we know they may be perfectly right. But when you read of the ghastly chain of events that befell little Yiggar Throlg—and when you have got your aching stomach muscles back into something approximating their proper place—we have a hunch you'll agree with us that this is one story we had to run. Incidentally it introduces to our pages a most promising young author whose work we hope soon to serve you again!

—THE EDITOR

a novelet by C. H. LIDDELL



CHAPTER I

Why Did It Have to Happen to Me?

I'M just an ordinary gnome and why the thing should have happened to me I can't understand. If I'd been an elemental or a nereid—they're always getting mixed up in water-magic—it'd be different. But, as I say, I'm a plain, down-to-earth gnome of the Middle Kingdom and I had never really believed in humans.

Of course as a *yndling* I'd been told all sorts of fantastic folklore by my nurse. You know the sort of thing, where inoffending vampires are captured by a

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Yiggar Throlg

hobhuman and tortured to death with garlic and stakes and so on. But I'm a materialist. Most gnomes are. We believe in the unalterable laws of physics, such as the First Law—*cold iron is poison.*

But humans—*well!* It's always some other gnome who has known a gnome who's seen one.

I've changed my mind now. That's why I'm considered a little cracked—me, Yiggar Throlg, whose family have been honest diggers and delvers since back in the days of the Norway burrows

Here is what can happen to a perfectly respectable gnome who has the misfortune to come in contact with human beings!

The king bellowed at me. "You miserable crawling offspring of a slug!"

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and beyond that, I've heard, to Yggdrasil.

By Vulcan, I'm no moon-struck werewolf and I know what I saw and what happened to me. Even now sometimes I dream about that haunted spot, with a living green carpet of grass hiding the brown earth, and the moonrays shining on—it!

It must be dreadful to be a human.

Well, I suppose I should start at the beginning. I'd got lost in the burrows. King Breggir was yelling for more rubies and I was behind in my quota. The bag over my shoulder was almost empty and I didn't dare check in without at least a pound of gems.

Breggir was paving Red Street. He's an unreasonable gnome anyway, to my mind, and there wasn't any reason at all why the job should have to be finished in a week. But there it was. If I came back without my quota I'd be turned into a toad for seven hours. If I could have seen the future I'd have welcomed such a punishment rather than get tangled up with the supernatural.

The higher tunnels are seldom visited, you know, and some say they weren't built by gnomes. And that, I believe now, is true. I must have traveled a long way, searching vainly for rubies, when I came without any warning whatsoever upon the inexplicable.

The ground under my feet changed to a hard smooth substance like whitish gritty rock and I found myself in a small tunnel, not much larger than my body. I'm an ordinary-sized gnome but presently I had to squeeze my way forward. I simply couldn't turn back in that narrow space. And at last I found my way blocked by a grating which for a moment I thought was cold iron. Luckily it wasn't, so I wrenched it away and stuck my head out.

There was a park-like expanse all around me, with the moon shining down and trees casting their long shadows. I could hear water rippling far away and smell it. All at once I felt a hot shudder pass down my spine. Something was—wrong.

THERE are times, they say, when the Veil wears thin and we can see what lies beyond. This was such a time, I know now. For there was something in the park that should not have been there—something alive and very dreadful. I could sense it.

What I had taken to be a distorted tree near by suddenly stirred. Its shadow swayed on the grass. The moon washed it in white light. And I saw that it was a Horror.

I couldn't move. I was paralyzed. The creature wasn't ten feet away. It looked perfectly tangible and three-dimensional, not unlike a satyr though the legs were straight and it wore clothing.

My reactions were surprising even to me. I didn't faint. I was too scared. I just remained where I was, with my head sticking up out of the hole where the grating had been, and the—being—watched me. The tableau might have lasted for hours for all I know. It was broken when the human—for it *was* a human—lifted an arm and beckoned to me without making a sound.

Every muscle in my body shrieked protest but I couldn't disobey. I crawled out on the grass and stood there shivering, with the feeling of a hot wind blowing on my face. I faced worse than death, I knew—and then, all of a sudden, I remembered I was Yiggar Throlg, a gnome of the Middle Kingdom.

Bravado, perhaps, but I squared my shoulders and looked at the human unflinchingly. I hope it isn't vanity that makes me believe I cut a good figure. I'm two feet tall in my sandals and thirty inches wide and my eyes, which look like brown eggs, did not fall or waver.

The human took something—a bottle—out of the folds of his garments. With deliberate, menacing slowness he uncapped it.

"All right," he said. "Get back in."

There was liquid in the bottle, swishing back and forth, and a strong alcoholic odor tainted the air like mead when they feast in Valhalla. But the flagon's innocent appearance didn't fool me. I knew about the djinns and how Sulei-

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man had enslaved them. If I obeyed the bottle would be capped and flung into the ocean.

"I—I *won't!*" I managed to get out through chattering teeth.

"You came out of this bottle," the human told me. "Now, by heaven, get back in!"

"I *didn't* come out of it—" Imagine! I was arguing with a human!

The creature made an impatient sound that was almost gnomish. "Dor ; give me that," he snapped, swaying (ghtly. "They all come out of bottles- snakes and mice and sea-serpents. Now—"

"I'm certainly not a sea-serpent," I said, "and as for snakes and mice there aren't any such things."

He smiled, very horribly, but didn't answer. I felt sure that he believed in snakes and mice and might even have seen them. "Anyway," I said, plucking up a bit of courage, "I'm not going into that bottle—please?"

He drank out of it and considered me thoughtfully. "Who are you?"

I told him. He shook his head. "No. I mean *what* are you?"

"I'm a gnome," I said.

I wasn't prepared for the reaction my words had. The being before me let out a wild yell and sprang straight up into the air. I trembled in every limb, expecting to be torn apart and dissolved instanter.

But instead the human pointed a shaking finger at me and yelped, "Hellfire and damnation! It isn't enough that I write about the blasted things, eh? Now they come popping out from under my feet when I take a walk in Central Park.

"Well, by all the pulps and slicks in New York, I'm not going to stand for it, drunk or sober!" He flung the bottle at my head but naturally it didn't hurt. We gnomes are thick-skinned.

"Sure I'm drunk!" he went on while I cowered before his fury. "If I wasn't drunk I wouldn't be seeing you. It's enough to make a guy split an infinitive! Look, you pot-bellied little rain-barrel!"

And he pulled out an oblong, flat object which I recognized as a tome. It looked like no book I had ever seen, except perhaps the *Brass Tablets of Belial*, but I guessed it was a grimoire of human spells. I shrank back—do you blame me?

"Always the same!" the human screamed, clutching the book in both hands. "Three wishes or a curse! I know the formula backwards—you meet a gnome or a man with white whiskers or the devil himself and he gives you something you regret afterward. Well, I'll be published in Braille if I let you pull a fast one on me, you miserable exhalation from a rum bottle. I've written too much about you."

HE waggled his hideously skinny finger at me. "Try some of your own —*urp*—medicine for a change. How'd you like that, eh? I know what you're getting ready to do. Work some of your magic on me so that when I wake up tomorrow I'll find that everything I touch turns to gold. Or a pudding on my nose. Or whenever I say anything silver dollars fall out of my mouth. *Ha!*"

I could only stare, petrified. The human raved on, glaring down at me. "Okay, gnome! You asked for it. Whenever you say anything from now on cold iron will fall out of your mouth. How do you like that, eh?"

I stumbled back, sick and shaking. My lips formed the word, "No—"

The being's grin was hideous. "So you don't like cold iron, eh? I thought so. I've written enough about you and your pals. Well, I won't be too tough. You'll be immune to the cold iron yourself—it won't hurt you. Gnomes—oh, my lord! Why don't I dig ditches for a living?"

He was overcome by fury and fell on his face. Before he could recover I whirled and leaped to safety. The black depths of the hole in the ground swallowed me. I flung myself into the tunnel, my back crawling with fear of attack. Perhaps I went a little insane then for I have no recollection of getting back to the Middle Kingdom.

In my brain two words were throbbing over and over as I raced on—"Cold iron. . . *Cold iron!*"

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Somehow I found my den and ...ng myself down, trying to sh... from my mind all memory ...at had happened. The exh... fear overcame me and I s... my sleep was broken by gri... ...ns.

I ...ke to find Trocklar, my closest friend, shaking me. "Yiggar," he said. "The King is furious. You didn't check in yesterday and the rubies are short. Did you make up your supply?"

Too dazed to answer I could only shake my head. Trocklar's nose thumped up and down against his chin as he chattered worriedly, "Fafnir and Loki aid you, then. The King has sworn to turn you into a salamander for ten moons. You'd better hide—"

I opened my mouth to speak, but Trocklar gave me no time.

"Not in the Middle Kingdom, of course. Perhaps Neptune will accept you for a while. Or—or even Hel might give you a haven if you bring her a big enough bribe. But you've got to hurry."

"Trocklar," I said, "I have seen a human."

Clink—clink! Trocklar went a pasty green and screamed hoarsely. He jumped back, eyes tightly closed and stumbled toward the door, hands clutching. I heard him gasp, *"Iron!"*

"Trocklar!" I followed him, and felt something hard and round under my sandal. Looking down I was just in time to see a small dull object fall out of my mouth and thud on the rock.

It was—*cold iron!*

No wonder Trocklar was clinging to the door jamb, lips twisted in a grin of agony. No wonder his eyes were squeezed shut against the blinding brilliance of iron. But—why didn't it affect me?

Then I remembered. The human's curse!

Trocklar peered around the door at me. "A heaven of a joke," he said sourly, still blinking. "What's the idea? If the King hears of this—"

"I can't help it," I said.

Clink-clink!

Trocklar yelped and jerked back. I ran after him.

"It's—*clink*—the—*clink*—h u m a n—*clink!*" At every word cold iron fell from my mouth. I tried to hold on to Trocklar but he tore free and went yelling away down the corridor and around a bend out of sight. I stood looking after him, feeling sick. Loki! There are things with which gnomes should not meddle!

And what now? I went back into my lair and blinked at the round pebbles on the ground. They seemed quite inoffensive and harmless. But they were as deadly as garlic to a vampire or wolfsbane to a werewolf. Such tiny things to be so packed with the power for evil.

CHAPTER II

In the Clink

MY sack wasn't hanging on its peg by the door. I'd forgotten it, lost it above ground in my panic to escape, and it had contained only a dozen rubies anyway. And King Breggir had sworn to turn me into a salamander.

To a gnome, born of the deep earth, the land of the fire-dwellers is ghastly. The Sea Realm isn't so bad and Triton and his gang are a gay lot. Even dark Hel is endurable for a time. But fire—*ugh!* Maybe if I threw myself on Breggir's mercy and apologized he'd forgive me—perhaps help me, somehow. I—well, I was frightened.

I didn't know what to do. I wandered around the lair, looking at the rainbow, cold sparkles of a myriad colors flashing from the jagged walls, the black pool in the corner. It wasn't much but it was home to me. I'm just an ordinary gnome and I confess that cold tears were in my eyes as I stared around.

But that did no good. I slipped out into the passage, wondering whether or not to flee. My decision was taken out of my hands as a couple of guards, armed with barbed spears, came scuttling toward me. Both wore green-and-brown uniforms and the scarlet caps of the royal troops.

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"Yiggar Throlg!" one said. "Old Breggir's blowing off lava again. You're under arrest—come along."

Just in time I remembered the curse on me and shut my mouth without saying a word. Things were bad enough as they were without my scattering cold iron and making them worse. I let the guards grab my arm and pull me along the tunnel under the big shining jewels in the roof.

We went through the Major Caverns —I noticed Red Street had a hundred gnomes working on it—and entered the throne room, where Breggir sat on a diamond larger than himself. He was an imposing figure, with a beard that came down to his knees, mottled becomingly with loam, and like all gnomes he was bald. He was a beautiful gnome.

His mouth stretched around under each pointed ear and his nose was as big as my fist. His eyes bulged so that it seemed as though three large balls had been stuck on his face. He was drinking warm mud out of a silver cup and arguing with his physician, Crog.

"You're a stubborn idiot," Crog was snarling. "I've warned you about your ichor-pressure. Yet you keep on drinking mud, morning, noon and night!"

"Oh, carbon!" Breggir grunted and saw me. His mouth made a square. His voice was earthquake-thunder.

"*Yiggar Throlg!*" he bellowed at me. "You miserable crawling offspring of a slug! You wood-tick on the bark of Yggdrasil!" That was a nasty crack at my ancestors but I let it pass. I couldn't have said anything anyway for the King was still shouting.

"You nasty little lump of anthracite! You short-nosed verminous louse on a harp's tail! I'll have you toasted in Vesuvius and chased by scorpions! I'll tie a millstone to your beard and give you to the Giants! Where in Helved are those rubies?

"Don't tell me! You went to sleep in some far cavern and thought you could lie out of your laziness. Well, you can't! There's been too much laxness in the Middle Kingdom lately. I'm going to make an example of you, Yiggar Throlg! Just wait!" he promised and waved his sceptre at me.

There were dozens of gnomes all around me now, staring, some of them grinning furtively. I guess they thought it was fun to see somebody else in trouble for a change. Being part of Breggir's retinue is no bargain. It's like patting Cerberus on the heads.

The King extended his huge gnarly hands and clutched at the air in my direction. "Speak up!" he bellowed. "What's your lying excuse, you crawling little cutworm? It doesn't matter. I passed sentence on you hours ago. A salamander, that's what you'll be. Hear that? A salamander!

"Well? Are you going to speak up or do we use cold pincers on your tongue?" He grinned maliciously. "You don't like that, do you? Ice-cold pincers, frozen by the Frost Giants. Speak up!"

The last two words came out like levin. Involuntarily my mouth opened. I was so scared I forgot all about the inevitable results. "It wasn't my fault!" I gasped. "I met a human—"

"*Ha!* A hu—*yaah!*"

It had happened. Cold iron clinked on the marble at my feet. There were immediate shrieks from all around me as gnomes fell over each other in their anxiety to get away from the vicinity of the deadly metal.

King Breggir fell over backward. His skinny legs were visible from behind the diamond throne, waving frantically. Crog, the physician, shrieked and fled. Breggir scrambled to his feet and followed. But he took time to look back, squinting against the glare of cold iron, and to roar in an agonized voice, "You'll be minced for this, Yiggar Throlg!"

I was alone in the splendid cold silence of the throne room.

It was *lèse majesté*, of course, but there was the silver cup standing on a pedestal, almost filled with warm mud. I drank it at a gulp and instantly felt a surge of false courage. I was still scared at heart but I was remembering that even the King had fled from my presence.

Every gnome in the Middle Kingdom

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would be afraid of me—holy Hecate! For an instant a mad thought entered my mind. Nothing less than revolution. With cold iron I'd be invulnerable—

Oh-oh—no I wouldn't. Magic would still work on me. And if I were turned into a salamander I'd be in a worse fix than ever.

WHAT to do? I couldn't explain. With every word I spoke I'd only get deeper into the mess. I longed for the understanding touch of a friendly hand—but even Trocklar, my best friend, had fled from me.

Then I thought of Nigsar Doog. She'd understand. Somehow she had always understood my troubles, ever since we'd been *yndlings* together. I—well, I was in love with Nigsar. To me she was the most beautiful gnome under the world.

She wouldn't run from me. She wouldn't be afraid. And Nigsar would help me somehow. That I knew.

I ran into a side passage, hurrying toward her lair. A telepathic message quivered through the air, making me gasp. King Breggir had sent it forth.

"All gnomes attention! Calling all gnomes! Yiggar Throlg is practising forbidden magic! He is armed with cold iron! Enchant him on sight—he is dangerous!"

I quickened my pace, shivering. What a predicament! We gnomes are immortal, of course, but spells can be pretty uncomfortable. I sent up a silent prayer to Fafnir and either through his intervention or by sheer good luck I encountered no one during my hasty flight. At the door of Nigsar Doog's den I paused, looking around furtively.

There was only silence in the passage. But the sound of voices came through the door. I put my hand on the latch, then hesitated as I caught a few words. Nigsar's soft tones. . . .

"*No!* You're lying! There must be some explanation."

And the voice of Trocklar, my bosom friend. "He's gone bad, Nigsar, that's all. Cold iron! He's to be enchanted on sight. Breggir will spell him under Vesuvius for eternity."

A soft sob made my heart ache. "No—I don't believe you, Trocklar. I know Yiggar better than that."

"Anyway, the King has spoken. You'd better forget about Yiggar Throlg."

There was subtle meaning in Trocklar's tone. Unbelieving I stood and heard Nigsar ask, "What do you mean?"

"That I want you—I, Trocklar. Yiggar never was good enough for you. And he's doomed now. Take me instead, Nigsar. Where in the Middle Kingdom could you hope to find a better gnome?"

Blind fury surged up within me. I heard Nigsar cry out, heard Trocklar's voice raised in hoarse passion.

"No—don't! *Don't* Nigsar—take your hands off me!"

As I kicked the door open I heard Trocklar mouthing, "You're mine, d'you hear? The King will give you to me if I ask him. I want you—"

He had Nigsar in his arms and she was fighting him off with all her strength. Her tunic was torn, baring one soft hairy shoulder and I went a little mad at the sight. I took one leap forward and clutched Trocklar by the neck, spinning him around to face me.

Nigsar cried, "*Yiggar!*" She pulled out of her attacker's grasp and fled into the adjoining chamber.

Trocklar's face was a study in fear and rage. "*You!* Still at large, eh? Well, you won't be for long. The King has given free leave to use every spell against you."

I couldn't speak. I choked with rage.

He threw a spell at me, and it bounced off harmlessly. I saw his eyes widen. He tried another and that too failed.

"*Loki!*" he cried. "You're invulnerable!"

I smiled, realizing what had happened. Human magic protected me. As long as I was under a human curse no other sorcery could touch me by the law of Precedence of Power, laid down by Odin when Hugin and Munin were hatched.

Then I went cold with fury again. My best friend—*ha!* Well, I had a weapon which he, like every other gnome, feared.

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"Cold iron," I said deliberately. *Clink!* "Cold iron. Cold iron. Cold-cold-cold. Iron-iron-iron." *Clink-clink-clink!* At every word small round ingots fell from my mouth, rattling around our feet.

TROCKLAR'S eyes were bulging crescents of agony. He lowered his head till only the dome was visible above his broad hunched shoulders and clawed at the air. He made hoarse choking sounds. "No," he choked. *"No!"*

"Yes," I said. "Yes, yes, yes." *Clink—clink-clink-clink!* I kept on talking, repeating meaningless words, and a small pile of cold iron grew at my feet. I drove Trocklar back into a corner.

Unable to endure the torture longer he fainted. His lumpy gnarled body collapsed in a heap and I felt the anger leave me. Eyeing the cold iron on the ground I remembered the curse upon me.

Nigsar. I entered the adjoining chamber to see her lying unconscious on her couch of pebbles. She was very lovely and I sank to my knees beside her and took her in my arms.

Her soft, muddy eyes opened. She whispered, "Yiggar—you're all right?"

"Yes," I said.

By Father Ymir I could have cut out my tongue! You've guessed what happened. I was leaning over Nigsar, my face above hers, and before I realized what had happened a lump of cold iron fell out of my mouth and bounced off Nigsar's nose. I might have stabbed her with an iron stake for the screech she let out. She gave me one glance of unbelieving pained horror and fainted again.

I ground my teeth together, wishing I'd never have to open my lips again. Somehow I got up, brushed the iron away and kicked it into a corner, stumbled out of Nigsar's apartments into the corridor. There I stood, dazed, and heard that faint whispering in my mind that meant King Breggir was again ordering my capture.

"Enchant him on sight!"

Well, no enchantment could harm me now—I'd found that out. But I was a pariah. No gnome would ever come near me in the future, not even Nigsar. I couldn't ask it of her. For her own sake I must never see her again.

As I trudged along the tunnel my heart was heavy. I felt like a Gorgon. In all the Middle Kingdom there was not one who would not fear me once I opened my mouth. I was lonely for gnomish companionship, the hammer of picks and shovels in the good brown earth, the happy fights I remembered and the quiet evenings in my den. I was a gnome without a home. My mind sought feverishly for some means of escape.

I tried to summon logic to my aid. First of all I couldn't tell any gnome what had happened to me—for the moment I spoke my listeners would flee. You may wonder why I didn't employ telepathy but King Breggir uses a machine of some kind to transmit his thoughts when necessary and not even he can read them. *Wait!* I had an idea!

Remember the little dark pool in my den? It isn't shallow by any means and connects with an underground sea, which is a territory of Neptune though under a provisional governorship.

The water folk aren't afraid of cold iron, and I'd sometimes had to throw pebbles into the pool to keep them quiet at night. All the nereids want to be members of the Lorelei and the way they practise singing at all hours is a shame and a caution. But I hoped they'd forget my rudeness now.

Nevertheless I took the precaution of drawing some ichor from a vein in my arm and letting a drop or two of it trickle into the pool as I called. I'd barred the door and had reached my lair by unfrequented tunnels so I didn't really expect interruption. I waited.

CHAPTER III

Going to Hel

I DIDN'T actually know whether or not the sea folk could help me. Yet I had to tell someone what had hap-

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pened. I felt so awfully alone. Never until that moment had I realized the necessity of other gnomes' companionship.

The black water bubbled and a green head came up, the gills flushed and quivering with excitement. "Oh, a gnome," the nereid said, staring at me, then fastening a greedy stare on the cup of ichor in my hand. "Give me that, gnome."

I drew back. "Now wait a minute," I hedged. "I want something first."

"Never knew a gnome who didn't," was the reply. "Dissatisfied dirty little wretches. Well? Want your death foretold?" That was a joke, of course, because gnomes don't die.

"I want to find out something about humans—"

"Oh-*ho!*" The nereid's fishlike eyes widened. "There's a spell on you, gnome. King Breggir do it? But no—he'd never fool with cold iron. Maybe Vulcan then?"

"Never you mind," I snapped. "Have you ever seen a human? That's all I want to know."

"Ouch!" the nereid bubbled, sinking below the surface briefly. "Careful where you lean. You're dropping cold iron on my head."

"Sorry," I said, leaning to the side. "But what about humans?"

"They don't exist. You're too old to believe in such things. Next thing you'll be telling me you believe in science."

"All right," I snapped, turning away. "Just forget it." There was a cold lump of hopelessness in my chest.

The nereid splashed excitably. "But the ichor? Don't I get any?"

I shook my head. "Why? You can't help me."

"Well—wait a minute. Maybe some other nereid can help you, gnome. Tell you what. I'll go and see, if you'll give me that ichor."

"I'll give you half," I compromised and let her have it, though I was forced to yank the cup from her hand when she tried to gulp all the contents down at once. I'll say one thing—nereids keep their word. It was scarcely ten minutes before she was back with a bedraggled companion, blind in one eye and with scars all over her. She could only mumble unintelligibly till I showed her the ichor. Then she brightened.

"Gimme! *Gimme!*"

The first nereid said, "This is Sahaya. She's crazy—tried to swim between Scylla and Charybdis a few centuries ago and never had a lick of sense since. But sometimes she'll talk about humans."

"Humans," Sahaya mumbled, scratching her gills. "They're real. *I* know. I know where the Drowned come from too. Before they come out of their chrysalis and come below they're humans."

"Hear that?" the first nereid giggled. "Looney as a sea-urchin." She flipped her tail and dived indignantly as I shushed at her.

Sahaya was still watching my cup of ichor. "For me?" she begged.

"If you can help me. Notice anything funny about me?"

"The cold iron, you mean? An enchantment."

"A human did it," I said, trying to ignore the continual *clink-clink* at my feet.

Sahaya cackled and blew bubbles. She bobbed up and down gently in the pool. "See? See? There *are* such things!"

It was difficult trying to get Sahaya to understand what I wanted but I managed to at last. She squeezed her eyes shut.

"I don't know. I used to swim up almost to the Light. I've heard things. But where you can go to get a human curse taken away is more than I can tell."

"You—you've heard things?"

"Voices. Some say I'm mad, gnome, but I know what I know. Voices speak to me out of the sea. I hear—humans—talking."

A little chill went through me at that. But I kept on doggedly. "Maybe you've heard them mention something that might help. If a human gets in trouble" —fantastic thought!—"how would he get out of it?"

Sahaya's answer surprised me. "Ah, trouble, yes. They do. I've heard them. Their voices sometimes rise with pain

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and annoyance but their problems are always solved. It is Hel who aids them."

"Hel? Loki's child—the sister of Fenris-wolf?"

"Yes indeed. If a human is in trouble he is advised to go to Hel for aid. I presume he does though—well, I don't really know."

My voice shook with excitement. "If *I* went to Hel now do you suppose she could take off the curse?"

But Sahaya could only shrug her gills for answer. She saw the cup of ichor again and went to pieces. I tried to question her again but all she could say was, "Give me that!" So I did and she sank, drooling and bubbling, back into the depths.

I HAD made up my mind. I'd go to Hel. The way was known to me, of course, though gnomes do little traveling. But the earth is our domain.

What suitable bribe could I take Hel, queen of the Underworld? I had no idea. Finally I ended up by taking nothing at all, determined to throw myself on her mercy. Not that she had any or she wouldn't have been Hel—but my brain just wasn't functioning any more.

I slipped out of my den. The Middle Kingdom was in an uproar. It was a wonder I wasn't discovered though my way led into an unfrequented district where the Well of Tartarus is. I just climbed over the well-curb and dropped. It's an interesting descent but too well known to every gnome for me to take the time to describe now.

So at the lower opening I called on Air and Darkness to carry me into the Fields and there they left me before the gates and went wailing back into the under-abyss. The granite walls of Dis rose up to the red lava sky. There was not a sound as I stood before those towering ramparts, watching the iron gates. How could I enter Dis?

Well, before I had a chance to think a gigantic three-headed shaggy monster charged at me, barking like mad, his fangs dripping with saliva, his six eyes glaring. Cerberus is a discomforting sight always and I'd forgotten to bring him any cakes or bones. He couldn't injure me seriously but his teeth could hurt a lot, so I waited till he'd come close and then tried a magic spell on myself.

At the last moment I remembered that I was under a human curse but it was too late to do anything about it then. For some reason my own enchantment worked where the spells of other gnomes had failed. Perhaps I was *inside* the curse and that's why I succeeded in turning myself into a flea.

Cerberus stopped, staring, and I jumped on his back. Perhaps it was pure meanness but I bit and bit hard and then regretted it as Cerberus started to scratch like an earthquake. I shut my eyes and clung to a hair and at last the tremors subsided. Then I settled down to wait.

They feed Cerberus at sundown. It didn't seem very long before the dog turned and pranced back toward Dis. A little door at the bottom of one of the gates opened and closed behind us. Then everything was quite still.

If I'd cared to look around, I could have seen Dis. But I kept my eyes turned down. The stillness affected me unpleasantly and I knew from whose loins Hel's father had sprung in the gray dawn of the Universe when Ymir's roars had not yet died. Dis is not a good place to be in. . . .

Then I knew I was with Hel. I turned back into my own gnomish shape and jumped off Cerberus' back. He turned on me with a snarl but paused instead and slunk into a corner, where he crouched, regarding me balefully out of his six red-rimmed eyes.

I got down very respectfully on my knees before Hel. The vast chamber in which I stood wasn't very long or broad but it went up and up to a tapering cone far above. It was like the interior of a candle-flame.

I heard a voice say, "You may stand, gnome."

I obeyed, but stared at the floor.

"You may look at me, gnome."

Hel is all white, like a woman of lambent snow. Her flowing hair isn't faded at all—it's naturally white and so are

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her lips and her eyes. She had the sweetly round face of a virgin girl and a very tender smile—but her eyes were far and far away. She sat leaning forward slightly on a plain onyx throne, her hands clasped about one knee. She wore light.

"Do not speak," she said. "Let me read your mind instead. I feel a curse and cold iron. . . ."

I wasn't afraid of Hel somehow. But I felt very little, very much alone, in that vast tall room in Dis.

At last she sighed and shook her head. "I cannot help you, gnome. My power does not reach above the surface of the earth."

She saw my despondency. "Here is one who may help you if he chooses. It is my father."

"Loki?" I thought.

"Loki the Laugher, whose children were his greatest jests. Aye," the dim, soft voice went on, "sister to the snake and the wolf am I—and child of the traitor god. But not Fenris nor Midgard serpeant can help you, gnome. Loki may. Go to him.

"No," she answered my unspoken thought. "You need take him no bribe. None would tempt the Laugher. He does what he wishes and is kind and cruel by turns. You may find him when he is kind. If so he will aid you."

I bowed my head in grateful thanks. And the white woman said, "I give you warning. Beware of Loki's jests. Now I send you to him."

Somehow I knew that Hel's hand hovered over my head. I had a horrible unreasoning dread that those cold fingers might touch me. They would be very soft and gentle, I knew, but I cowered down nevertheless.

Then magic took me and whirled me away. The tall room in Dis was gone. Hel vanished. I stood on yielding gray cloud with a laughing giant who reclined before me, squinting into the sunlight.

NEXT ISSUE
THE TWO SHADOWS
A Novelet of the Future
By WILLIAM F. TEMPLE

CHAPTER IV

Gno Place Like Gnome

He propped himself up on one elbow and stared at me, a huge redbearded fox of a man with sly eyes and a wide mouth.

"Ho!" he chuckled. "Hel told me you were coming. Well, I am Loki!"

I bowed, but dared not speak with the curse on me. Loki laughed again.

"Do you think I fear cold iron? But you need not say anything—your mind is open to my eyes. You met a human and he cursed you. You wish the curse removed. Well, that is simple enough."

Loki lifted his great arm in a commanding gesture. For a space nothing happened while I stole surreptitious glances around. But there was nothing to see save the carpet of gray cloud that stretched to the horizon under a blue sky where Apollo rode high.

Silently I wondered. Had I caught Loki in a kind mood or in a cruel one? The red god laughed. He had caught my thought. He nodded to me reassuringly.

"Wait. I'll take off the curse. Humans exist, gnome, but it's very seldom that any of them pass the Veil. Sometimes we see them as phantoms, dimly and vaguely. Yet they have their own world." Loki squinted at me. "Humans shouldn't practise magic. I don't like it. Well—"

Somehow I felt a little tug of uneasiness at his words. It was gone immediately as a dark shape rose up through the floor of shifting cloud.

It was a gray woman, a withered ancient crone. She held a spool of threads in one knobby hand. Silently she selected one thread from the rest and gave it to Loki. Then she sank down and vanished without trace. The mists closed above her cowled head.

Loki stretched the thread between his fingers. "The Norns weave the destiny of humans. This thread will lead you to the one who put the spell upon

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you. But you must take him a bribe or he will not take off the curse."

"What bribe?" I asked. Cold iron fell down through the floor-clouds.

Loki grinned. "I'll provide you with that. Just do as I say and you'll be all right."

"Well—" I hesitated. "What shall I do with the thread afterward?"

"Eh? Oh—just let go of it. It'll snap back into its place on the Norns' spool." Loki's squinted eyes held a look I didn't like. He resembled a fox more than ever. But before I could say another word the god waved his hand and I went spinning and dropping through the gray cloud-masses. I found I had the thread, one end of it, clutched tightly in my fist.

And somehow, I thought I heard Loki's voice whispering, "Humans shouldn't practise magic. . ."

The clouds were gone. I felt solid wood under my feet. It was dark but gradually my eyes accustomed themselves to the gloom. The moon was shining through rectangular gaps in what I took to be a wall.

I was in a cavern—a huge square one made of wood. There was the same crawling heat down my spine I had first felt when I encountered the human. This must be one of their dens!

I held the thread in a sweaty palm. Its other end I couldn't see though it seemed to stretch up and up.

There were big square objects piled up all around me, with lettering on them. And signs in some alien language which nevertheless bore a strange resemblance to Ancient Elf. I couldn't understand them but I still recall how they looked, and jotted them down from memory afterward, for curiosity's sake.

They looked like this:

NO SMOKING! DANGER! HIGH EXPLOSIVES!

Loki's disembodied voice said in my mind, "That box beside you—"

"Box?" The word was unfamiliar to me.

"There." My gaze was dragged to a wooden container which held dozens of neatly-packed roundish objects. Cold iron! But they couldn't harm me while I was under the curse.

"Take one," Loki said. I obeyed, examining the thing with curiosity. But I didn't know what it was.

I remember the legend on the side of the box. It looked like *hand grenades*, whatever that meant.

Loki's voice came, with an undercurrent of laughter. "The Norns' thread will lead you to your human. When you face him take out that little pin in the side of the—bribe—and throw it at his feet. After that, you've only to ask him to take off the curse and he'll be glad to oblige. Good luck, little gnome," the red god ended—and his voice fell silent.

I felt almost happy again. Soon I'd be free from the doom of cold iron. Once that curse was removed I could face anything else—even King Breggir's anger. So I shut my eyes and waited.

I FELT the destiny-thread jerk me through dimensions. When I looked again, I was *in*—

A den of humans!

No wonder I clutched the bribe to my breast, shivering with fright. I can't begin to describe the place. It was all square and curves with the most horrible alien colors you can imagine. A place where the blackest sort of science might be practised!

I saw the human at the same time he saw me. He let out a perfectly indescribable sound and dropped the bottle he was holding. "*Again!*" he yelped. "Or is it another one?"

"I'm the same gnome," I said placatingly. "You ought to know that after what you did."

He retrieved the bottle and drank out of it. "Ah—what *I* did? I don't get you."

"The curse. The one you put on me. Cold iron, you know." And now he noticed the round pebbles that were falling from my mouth. His eyes got large.

"I—*ulp*—*I* did that?"

"Yes."

Clink.

"Oh," he said. "I'm sorry. Drunk or dreaming, I apologize."

"Won't you take it off?" I begged.

He blinked at me. "Take it off?"

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"The curse."

"Look," he said. "I'd be glad to after what you did for me but I don't know how."

I let out a squeak of disappointment. "But you've *got* to! I've brought you a bribe."

"Glory," said the human, "I don't want any more. I've got enough now. Those rubies you left were plenty."

I stared—and suddenly remembered the bag of rubies I'd abandoned during my hasty flight from the first interview with the creature. He'd found them then.

"Thousands," the Man gloated cryptically, waving the bottle. "I'm living in a penthouse now. I'm writing a novel. A good one too—earthy. The old Hemingway touch. Those rubies—well, thanks."

"You're quite welcome," I said politely. "But you must be able to take off the curse. You put it on me just by saying cold iron would drop out of my mouth."

He took another drink, considered, and nodded. "It's worth trying. Okay. I take the curse off you."

"Thank you," I said experimentally, and then stood with my mouth wide open. *No cold iron had dropped out of it!*

"It—it worked!" I gasped. "It *worked!* Thank Loki!"

Perhaps I was a bit hysterical, but for the moment I really forgot I was talking to a human. It was so wonderful just to be able to speak without iron falling from my lips at every word. I—well, I told the Man everything. And he sat and listened, still drinking out of the bottle. Soon he got out another one and started on that.

Finally he took the bribe out of my hand and considered it thoughtfully. "You'd better let me have that," he said. "I'll dispose of this thing. Uh—thanks for bringing it. A grenade's an unusual present at least."

"The thread," I reminded him, holding up the Norn-thread. He didn't touch it. He looked very white.

"Yes. Just—let it go, will you?"

I obeyed. The thread snapped out of my hand and vanished. The human drew a deep breath and I saw that his lips were bleeding. "Okay," he said after a second. "I guess I'm safe. What's next on the program?"

"I'm going back to the Middle Kingdom," I said. "If I can find my way. Could you, maybe, show me the hole I came out of last time?"

"In Central Park? Sure. But you say King Breggir's mad at you?"

I shrugged philosophically. "He may forgive me. If not, I'll just have to be a salamander for awhile."

BUT the human was thinking. "Yeah. Maybe I can give you a bribe to take him. Here. . ." He went out, came back with a sack and filled it up with bottles that he took out of a small den in the wall. "This is better than warm mud. It may soften the old so-and-so up a bit."

"I—I can't thank you enough," I said, and my voice trembled with emotion. "Somehow you—you're almost like a gnome to me."

He shuddered at that, though I can't imagine why, and took my hand. "We'll go down in the service elevator. We're just across the street from the park so—"

I kept my eyes tightly shut and let the human guide me. It was better, I felt, that I did not see too much of this strange human-world. And at last I stood at the edge of the hole with the sack of bottles over my shoulder.

The Man squeezed my hand. "Good luck," he said. "I'll never believe this, of course, but it seems quite real to me just now." He eyed the sack. "Can you spare one of those bottles?"

I gave it to him and he drank a good deal of the liquid in it. After that he fell on his face and didn't move so I crawled down into the hole, dragging the sack after me. And hours later I was in the Middle Kingdom. . . .

There isn't much more to tell. I had to talk fast or I'd have been turned into a salamander like winking—but the minute Breggir found I'd brought him

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a bribe he softened up. He mixed a cocktail of warm mud and human-elixir and grinned so widely the top of his head almost came off.

He never believed my story, of course. He thought I'd found the bottles where some ancient godling had buried them but he said the stuff was better than nectar. Not that the old gopher had ever tasted nectar in his life but I didn't contradict him.

Anyway Breggir forgave me and so did my dear Nigsar Doog. We are to be married within the month. It will be a great feast to which all the Middle Kingdom is invited. I have spared no expense and mud will flow like lava.

What if the gnomes whisper that there's insanity in my family—me, Yiggar Throlg, whose ichor has come down from Yggdrasil and Ymir? I don't mind, really.

I'm completely happy with Nigsar, and my recent dreadful experiences have almost faded from my mind.

Well—that isn't exactly true. My dreams have been troubled. I—I dream of—*humans!*

Stranger than Fiction

TRITIUM, the triple-weight hydrogen that is vital to H-bomb planners at present, has been discovered in moisture in the air. However, since the element is present in only one part to one quintillion (1,000,000,000,000,000,000) parts of water those who fear fission explosions of morning dew scarcely need worry.

RATS and cats, long held "natural" enemies, have been taught to work and play not only together but in teams by Dr. Loh Seng Tsai, Tulane University psychologist. In one instance when, after getting its tail caught in a cage gate, a rat shied away from getting food in another cage, its cat partner went back, ushered the rat inside.

ULTRASOUND, inaudible to human ears, raises hob with the nerve tissues of the human body. According to Dr. Warren A. Bennett of the Mayo Foundation, who has been studying the effect of ultrasonics on abnormal growths, "Lack of destructive selectivity has led to the destruction of normal tissues as well as the tumor. Marked changes appear to be irreversible."

TALKING fast does not mean unintelligibility, says Dr. Richard H. Henneman of the University of Virginia. Recent tests, conducted with tape recordings, reveal that rapid speech may be a time saver, as human ability to understand the spoken word does not appreciably lessen until it is more than twice as fast as normal.

HOW polio and other virus diseases are manufactured from a single virus by the human body itself has been the subject of recent experiments by Drs. Joseph L. Melnick and John B. Leroy of Yale. Apparently, once a virus cell has taken root in the system, our bodies themselves do the deadly duplication work needed.

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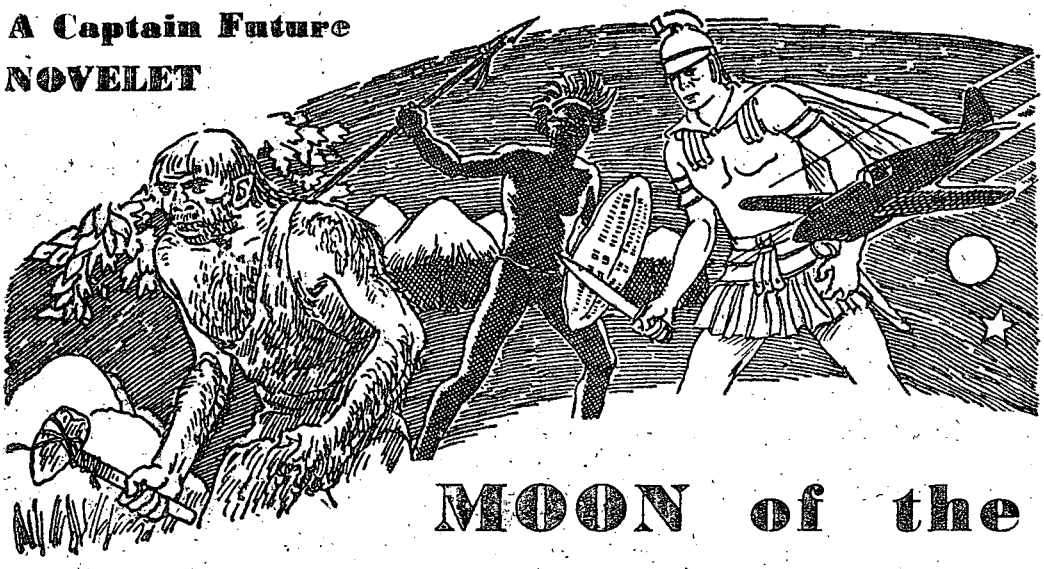
A Captain Future
NOVELET



MOON of the UNFORGOTTEN

By EDMOND HAMILTON

CHAPTER I

The Second Life

THE machines hummed and whispered and a man's life changed. He was an old man, with an old man's burden of weariness and sorrow. But now that burden dropped from him and his years dropped from him and he was young again.

He felt the hot blood burst along his veins and the singing excitement in his nerves, the pulse and throb of long-forgotten youth. For youth was his once more and once more a whole universe of adventure lured and beckoned, far-off worlds calling and calling to him.

And Ezra Gurney, he who had been old, shouted a glad young cry that was answer to that call.

* * * * *

A message went to Earth's Moon, flashing across the millions of empty miles. It went by a secret wave-frequency that only a half-dozen people knew.

Back across the empty leagues of the void, in reply to that urgent summons, came a ship, driving hard for Europa, moon of Jupiter. There was a man in the small ship and one who had been a man and two who were manlike but who were not truly human.

The ship came down toward the dark side of Europa with the rush of a shooting star and landed in the rigidly restricted Patrol area of Europolis spaceport. The four came out of it and looked around in the magnificent glow of Jupiter. Then they heard the light running steps and the urgent voice.

"Curt!" And again, with a desperate gladness, "Curt, I knew you'd hurry!"

Curt Newton took the girl's tense outstretched hands in his own. He thought for a moment she was going to weep and he spoke to her with an affectionate roughness, not giving her time to be emotional. "What's all this nonsense about Ezra? If anyone but you had sent that message . . ."

"It's true, Curt. He's gone. I think—I think he won't ever come back."

Newton shook her. "Come on, Joan! *Ezra?* Why, he's been up and down the

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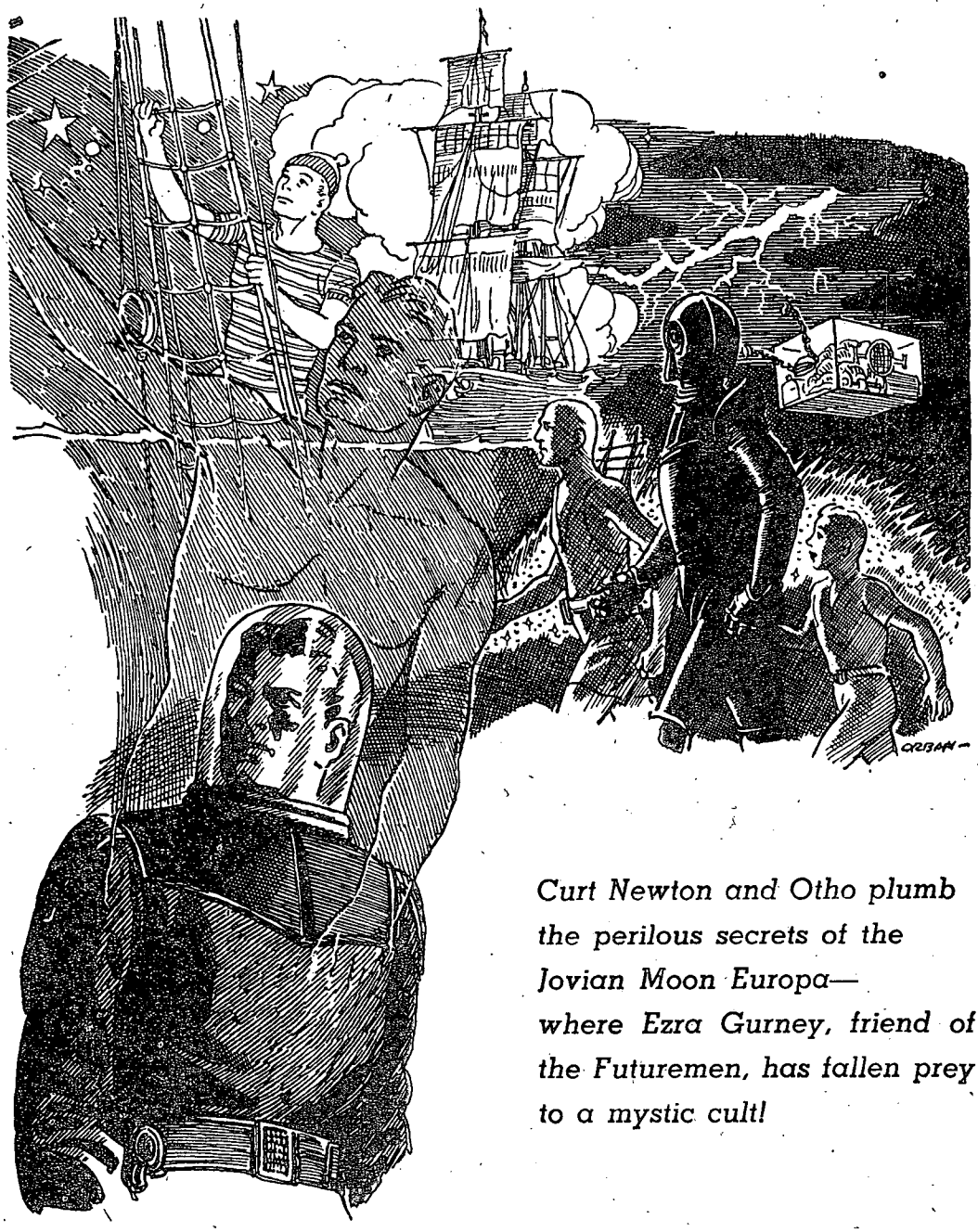

Curt Newton and Otho plumb the perilous secrets of the Jovian Moon Europa—where Ezra Gurney, friend of the Futuremen, has fallen prey to a mystic cult!

System since before you and I were born, first in the old space-frontier days of the Patrol and now with your Section Three. He wouldn't get himself into any jam."

"He has," said Joan Randall flatly. "And if you'll stop being comforting I have all the data ready to show you—what there is of it."

SHE led the way toward the low buildings of Patrol headquarters. The four followed her, the tall red-haired man whom the System called Captain Future and his three companions, his lifelong friends, the three who were closer to him even than this girl and the missing Ezra Gurney—Grag, the metal giant, Otho, the lithe keen-

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eyed android, and Simon Wright, who had once been a human scientist but who for half a lifetime now had been divorced from human form.

It was the latter who spoke to Joan. His voice was metallic and expressionless, issuing from the artificial resonator set in one side of his "body." That "body" was a hovering square metal case that contained all that was human of Simon Wright—his brilliant deathless brain.

"You say," said Simon, "that Ezra is gone. Where precisely did he go?"

Joan glanced at Simon, who was watching her intently with his lenslike eyes as he glided silently along on the pale traction beams that were his equivalent of limbs.

"If I knew where I wouldn't hide it from you," she said with an undertone of irritation.

In the next breath she said contritely, "I'm sorry. Waiting here has got me down. There's something about Europa —it's so old and cruel and somehow patient . . ."

Otho said wryly, "You need a double hooker of something strong and cheering." His green slightly-tilted eyes were compassionate beneath their habitual irony.

Grag, the towering manlike giant who bore in his metal frame the strength of an army and an artificial intelligence equal to the human, rumbled a question in his deep booming voice. But Curt Newton only vaguely heard him. His gaze had followed Joan's out into the alien night.

This was not his first visit to Europa. And he was surpised to find that Joan had put into words exactly what he had always felt about the silent moon, the old old moon that was scarred so deep by time.

Here, on one side, were the modern glare and thunder of the spaceport, busy with freighters and one or two sleek liners. Beyond the spaceport was Europolis, a glow of light behind a barren ridge. But on the other side, before him and behind him, was a sadness of ancient rock and distant hills, of brooding forest hung with shadow, of great plains empty in the red glow of Jupiter, dusty wastes where no herds had grazed and no armies fought for a hundred thousand years.

The woods and plains were scattered with the time-gnawed bones of cities, dead and forsaken even before the last descendants of their builders had sunk into final barbarism. A thin old wind wandered aimlessly among the ruins, whimpering as though it remembered other days and wept.

Newton could not suppress a slight shiver. The death of any great culture is a mournful thing and the culture that had built the shining cities of Europa was the greatest ever known—the proud Old Empire that once had held two galaxies. To Curt Newton, who had followed the shadow of that glory far back toward its source, the very stones of these ruins spoke of cosmic tragedy, of the agelong night that succeeded the blazing highest noon of human splendor.

The functional gleaming Patrol building brought his mind back to the present. Joan took them into a small office. From a locked file she drew a neat folder of papers and placed it on the desk.

"Ezra and I," she said, "were called into this case some time ago. The Planet Police had been handling it as a routine matter until some peculiar angles turned up that required the attention of Section Three.

"People had been disappearing. Not only people from Earth but other planets as well—*and nearly all of them older people.* In each case when they vanished, they took most of their wealth with them.

"Planet Police discovered that all these missing persons without exception had come to Europa. And here in Europolis their trails ended."

Simon Wright asked in his toneless voice, "Did they leave no clue as to why they came to this particular moon?"

"A few of them did," answered Joan. "A few of them before they left talked a little of something called the Second Life. That was all—just the name. But they seemed so eager and excited about

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it that it was remembered."

She continued, "Since they were nearly all aging people it seems obvious that the Second Life they were hoping for was some form of rejuvenation. A form of rejuvenation that must be illegal in nature or it wouldn't be carried on secretly."

Curt nodded. "That sounds reasonable enough. 'The Second Life'—the term is a new one to me. However, Jupiter and its moons retained the civilization and science of the Old Empire long after the other planets had relapsed into barbarism. To this day odd scraps of that ancient wisdom keep rising to plague us."

"Quite," said Simon dryly. "You will recall the case of Kenneth Lester, also that of the Martian, Ul Quorn. Europa in particular has always had a reputation in the System as a repository of knowledge that has been lost elsewhere. It's an interesting problem. It occurs to me—"

JOAN cut him short, genuinely angry now. "Are you and Curt going to start on that archaeological obsession of yours at a time like this? Ezra may be dead or dying!"

Captain Future said, "Steady on, Joan—you haven't yet told us exactly what happened to Ezra."

Joan caught a deep breath and went on more calmly.

"When we came here to investigate we found that the missing people who had arrived here had simply dropped out of sight. The Europans themselves refused to talk to us. But Ezra wouldn't give up and finally got a lead. He found that the missing folk had hired native mounts at an inn called the Three Red Moons and had ridden out of the city.

"Ezra planned to follow that lead out into the hills. He made me wait here—he said he had to have a contact here. I waited many days before Ezra got in touch with me through our micro-wave audio. He spoke briefly to me and switched off—and I've never heard from him since."

"His message?" asked Curt tensely.

Joan took out a slip of paper. "I wrote it down word for word."

Curt read aloud. "Listen carefully, Joan! I'm all right—safe, well and happy. But I'm not coming back, not for a while. Now this is an order, Joan—drop the investigation, and go back to Earth. I'll follow you later!"

That was all.

Otho said sharply, "He was forced to make that call!"

"No." Joan shook her head. "We have a secret code. He could have said the same words and yet could have let me know that he spoke under duress merely by a certain inflection. No, Ezra was talking of his own free will."

Galactic Trouble-Shooters

TIME WAS, not so long ago, when Captain Future and his oddly assorted trio of companions—Grag, the robot, Otho, the android, and Simon Wright, the disembodied brain-in-a-box—were undisputed rulers of the space-opera field. In their own magazine they roamed the stars as galactic trouble shooters, leaping from star-system to star-system even as you and I occasionally step across the street for lunch.

As science fiction drew closer and closer to grim reality in at least some of its more forbidding phases, demand for such breath-taking antics faded—until at last Captain Future was consigned to what was generally believed to be permanent and honorable rest.

But like Sherlock Holmes, the Futuremen could not die. Their readers refused to let them. So, a little over a year ago, we had Edmond Hamilton bring them back to life—in somewhat briefer form, in somewhat more mature form as befits a science fiction that is rapidly growing up. If you have not yet made the acquaintance of Moon-born Curt Newton and his colleagues it is high time you did—in this, one of the most fascinating episodes of the entire series. If you number yourself among their legion of followers you will need no urging.

—THE EDITOR.

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"Maybe he fell for this rejuvenation process, whatever it is?" suggested Grag.

"No," said Simon decisively. "Ezra would not do anything so foolish."

Curt nodded agreement. "Ezra has had plenty of tragedy in his life that few people know anything about. It's why he's always a little grim. He wouldn't want to live a second life."

"Second Life?" murmured Otho. "The name tells nothing. Yet there must be a clue in it."

Captain Future stood up. "This isn't a case for cleverness or subtlety. Ezra may be in danger and we're going to work fast. We'll go into Europolis and make those who know something talk."

Otho, his eyes sparkling, sprang to his feet. Grag took a clanking step toward the door.

"Wait, Curt." Joan's face was worried. "You know the Patrol can't legally arrest Europan citizens on their own world—"

He smiled without much mirth. "We're not Patrol. We'll take the consequences if any."

"It's not that," she cried. "I have a feeling that since Ezra's vanishing you Futuremen have been expected—*and prepared for.*"

Curt Newton nodded gravely. "Very likely. However, we're not exactly unprepared ourselves." He turned to the others. "Simon, will you stay here and go over Joan's data on the case till we return? And you, Grag—you'll remain to guard them both."

Grag looked and sounded as upset as his physical structure would permit. "But there's no telling what kind of trouble you'll run into! You'll need me with you!"

"Joan needs you worse. She's in every bit as much danger as we are."

That was partly true. It was also true that Grag's seven-foot-high clanking bulk was somewhat too conspicuous for what Curt Newton had in mind. Otho started to say so and Curt stopped him by saying, "Let's go."

He went out and Otho followed him, chuckling.

"Save your humor," said Curt dryly. "We may wish we had old Bone-crusher with us before we're through."

They walked swiftly toward the slope of the low ridge beyond which lay the city. The thin dust blew beneath their feet and the old wind sang of danger out of its long long memories of blood and death.

CHAPTER II

The Inn of the Three Red Moons

THE city lay in a shallow bowl between two spurs of a range so worn by the scuffing ages that it was now little more than a line of hills. Under the red glow of Jupiter the lordly towers slept in a sanguine mist that softened the scars of the broken stone. The cool light filled the roofless colonnades, the grand and empty avenues, and touched with a casual pity the faceless monuments that had long outlasted their forgotten victories.

Curt Newton stood in a still and shadowy street and listened to the silence.

On the near side of the ridge he could see the outworld settlement near the spaceport—infinitely farther away in time than it was in distance. There were the brilliant lights, the steel and plastic buildings of today, crowned by the white facade of the resort hotel. They had a curiously impermanent look. He took three steps along the winding way and they were gone.

The paving stones were hollow under his feet, rutted by the tread of a myriad generations. The walls of the buildings rose on either side, some mere shells with the coppery planet-light shining through their graceful arches, others still tolerably whole with window-places like peering eyes, showing here and there a gleam of light.

Otho, moving catlike at Curt's side, lifted his shoulders uneasily. "My back itches," he said.

Curt nodded. "We're being watched."

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There was nothing to show that this was so but he knew it as Otho did, without needing to see.

They came out into a wide square, from which many streets led off. In the center was a winged monument, so effaced by millenniums of wind and dust that it had the look of a grotesque skeleton, its eroded pinions stark against the sky. Curt and Otho paused beneath it, tiny figures beside that hundred-foot bulk of greenish marble.

Nothing stirred in the square. The deserted avenues stretched away, edged with clotted shadow. The fallen palaces and shattered temples reared to unknown gods stood still and brooding, remembering the banners and the glory, the incense and the crimson robes.

One or two of the streets showed life, where flaring light marked the wine-shops and the inns.

"Down there," said Captain Future and they went on, their boots ringing on the paving blocks.

They entered the street that Curt had chosen. And as they walked a little crowd began to gather, softly, unobtrusively, the dark-faced men in dusty cloaks coming without sound from the doorways, from the mouths of alleys, from nowhere and everywhere.

They were not the young men, the hot-handed fighters. Most of them were grey and some were bent and even the youngest of them had an indefinable look of age, a thing of the spirit rather than the flesh. They did not speak. They watched the tall Earthman and the lithe one beside him that seemed to be a man. Their dark eyes glistened and they followed the strangers, borne with them like a ring of tattered shadows shifting, flowing, thickening.

There was a coldness on Curt Newton's flesh. It was an effort to keep his hand away from the butt of his weapon.

"There it is ahead," said Otho quietly. "The sign of the Three Red Moons."

The soft-footed multitude around them swirled and coalesced into a silent barrier across the windy street.

Curt stopped. He did not seem to be afraid or even angry—merely curious. He regarded the wall of men with a patience equal to their own.

An old white-bearded man stepped forward. He was shorter by a head than the Earthman but he stood erect and there was an ancient beauty in his high-boned face, a deep grand sorrowful pride. His cloak was as old as he, dun-colored with the sifting dust, but he carried it as splendidly as though it had been fashioned of the purple cloth of kings.

He said with an odd sort of courtesy, "There is no passage here for strangers."

Captain Future smiled. "Come now, father—surely a thirsty man may refresh himself with wine."

The old man shook his head. "You do not come for wine. Return to your own kind—there is nothing for you here but sorrow."

"It has been told to me," said Curt slowly, "that others have come here seeking joy."

"Does not all mankind seek for joy? That is why I tell you—return to your own!"

CURT looked over the heads of the old man and the other men who were old and the men who should have been young but were not. He looked at the sign of the Three Red Moons and he said quite softly, "Will you stop me, father?"

The old man's eyes were very sad. "No," he said, "I will not stop you. I will only tell you this, that no man nor woman has yet been harmed nor will be harmed—but that he who comes in search of death shall surely find it."

"I shall remember," Curt said and began again to walk forward against the crowd, with Otho close beside him.

The ranks held unbroken, the rows of silent hostile faces, until he was almost touching them. Then the old man raised his hand and let it fall again in a gesture of finality. The crowd broke and the way was open. Curt passed on and behind him the men vanished one by one into the shadows again, like old leaves caught by the wind and whirled away.

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Curt and Otho entered the Inn of the Three Red Moons.

The common room was large, with a vaulted roof of stone, black as though carved from jet. Lights flared in the corners and a score of men sat around antique massive metal tables. They glanced at the two strangers, then ignored them.

Curt and Otho sat down in an empty place and presently a dark girl came and brought them wine and slipped away again.

They sipped the strong spicy brown liquid. They might have been no more than two spacemen off from the port for a night's pleasure in old Europolis. And yet they knew that eyes watched them, that the inn was too quiet. Captain Future's muscles quivered with anticipation and Otho's gaze was very bright.

Presently Otho said in a language not likely to be understood, "That young chap at the next table hasn't taken his eyes off us since we came in."

"I know." The dark fierce young face and hungry glance were only too obviously turned toward the strangers. Curt thought that if anything happened it would be men like this they would have to deal with, men still free of the withering taint of age that seemed to overtake the Europans in their prime.

He beckoned to the girl again. "We're minded to take a ride into the hills," he said. "Can we hire mounts here?"

The girl's face was expressionless. "That is Shargo's province."

"And where may we find Shargo?"

"Through that passageway. The paddocks are behind the inn."

Curt laid a coin on the table and rose. "Come on, Otho, it's getting late."

They crossed the common-room and entered the passage. Without seeming to notice Curt saw that the young man who had watched them left swiftly by the front door and that the others bent together in a sudden murmur of guarded talk.

The girl glanced after them. Her face held bitter resentment.

The passage was long and shadowy. They traversed it swiftly, hearing nothing to warn them of any danger. At its end it opened into a court containing ruined outbuildings and a stone-walled paddock in good repair. The wall was high, for the Europan beasts are good jumpers, and the gate was of iron bars.

A man came toward them from one of the ruined sheds. He was old and not nimble. He wore the leather tunic of a hostler and it was not even clean. But still there was about him the same look that Curt had seen before, the look of pride and inward vision, as though he saw the flaunt of silken banners in the wind and heard the trumpets sounding far away.

Captain Future repeated his request for two mounts.

He had expected refusals, at the least arguments and evasions. There were none. The old man shrugged and answered. "You will have to bridle them yourselves. In the day there is a young man here to hold the brutes and rein them—but the fools who wish to ride at night must catch their own."

"Very well," said Curt. "Give us the halters."

The old man produced two arrangements of leather straps, bitted with iron. "Get them by the combs," he grunted, "and watch their forefeet."

He led the way to the paddock gate.

Curt looked around. The court was empty. It was very still. Otho whispered, "What are they waiting for?"

"Perhaps they want us clear of the city," Curt answered. Another disappearance in the shadowy hills would be preferable from the Europans' viewpoint.

Otho nodded. "The trap could be at the other end. These beasts have been there before. They must know the way without being guided."

"One thing sure," said Captain Future, "they'll have to stop us somewhere."

The old man lifted the heavy bar of the gate.

The paddock was not too large for the herd of twenty or so Europan mounts that it contained. They were

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huddled together, drowsing in the Jupiter-light—serpentine scaly creatures with powerful legs and tails like wire lashes. Their narrow heads were crowned with fleshy yellow combs. They blinked and peered at the men with shining wicked eyes as red as coals.

"Take your choice," said the old Europan, standing by the gate.

Curt and Otho went forward with the bridles.

AT their approach the beasts hissed softly and backed away. Their padded feet made a nervous thumping on the ground. Curt spoke softly but the herd began to shift.

"I don't think they like the smell of us," said Otho.

Curt reached out swiftly and caught one golden comb. The creature plunged and whistled as he fitted the rude bridle. Then suddenly from behind them there came the clang of the gate-bar dropping and he knew that there would be no waiting for the silence of the dark hills, that this, here and now, was the trap—and that they were in it.

Otho had spun around, holding his bridled mount. He was cursing the old man. Curt kept his grip on his unwilling mount, turning with it to keep clear of the clawed forefeet. The paddock walls were high, worn smooth as glass by the rubbing of many flanks. There was no escape that way.

The herd was stirring uneasily, moving with a hiss and flickering of scaly tails, a quivering of muscles. Curt cried out a warning to Otho but it was already to late.

A makeshift torch of flaming rags whirled in over the gate, leaving a trail of oily smoke. Curt heard the old man's voice lifted in a cracked *Hai-hai,* urgent, shrill. A second wad of burning cloth shot in, dropping in the middle of the herd with a burst of sparks. Instantly there was brute panic, pent up and turned upon itself by the paddock walls.

Plunging, trampling, screaming, the penned beasts tried to flee the smoke and the stinging fire. Curt's mount reared and dragged him and he clung to its comb with the grip of a man who knows he is lost if he lets go. He dug his heels into the dusty ground, twisted the brute's head until its neckbones cracked and leaped up, clamping his legs around the slender belly.

Dimly through the dust and turmoil he saw Otho. An ordinary man would have been trampled to death in those first seconds. But Otho was not a man. Swift, sure-footed, incredibly strong, the android had imitated Curt's example and had swung himself to the back of his plunging mount, getting an iron grip on its comb.

It was only temporary escape. The maddened beasts had turned to fighting among themselves. Curt knew it was only a matter of time and not much of it before his creature would fall or be thrown. The paddock was a swirling madness of leaping bodies and tearing jaws and dust and noise. Nothing could stand for long in that.

The old Europan remained beyond the gate. He held another of the makeshift torches in his hands, waving it slowly back and forth so that all the beasts shied away from the opening.

A solemn proud fine-cut old man. Later he would be very sorry for this tragic accident. He would know nothing more than that two spacemen had drunk wine in the tavern and had then gone staggering in among the beasts and frightened them and been most regrettably slain.

Even in that moment of fury Curt found time to wonder what strange madness drove these men—the madness of the mysterious Second Life that urged them to any length.

He was trying to reach the gate when his mount stumbled over another that was down and kicking its life out in the dust and blood. He heard a wild yell from Otho and a commotion by the gate. The straining body under him staggered and fell. Desperately he pulled the creature's head back, forcing it up, forcing it on its feet again, and suddenly there was a rush past him of slaty backs and outstretched necks, a squealing stampede outward and the gate

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was open.

He fought his mount to keep it back. Over the wall, Otho was riding a frantic demon, twisting its comb until it shrieked. In a matter of seconds they were alone in the paddock and the herd was stamping through the courtyard, scattering away down the dark alleys.

The old man was gone, presumably to cover in one of the sheds.

"The young one," Otho panted. "Stand still, you son of a worm's egg! The young one that watched us inside the inn—he drove the old man off. He opened the gate."

The court was clear now. From the shelter of a broken wall a figure leaped and ran.

"Get him!" Curt yelled. *"Get him!"*

He sank his heels in the scaly flanks and the creature hissed and went hard after the running shadow.

CHAPTER III

The House of Returning

THEY caught him. They rode him down in a narrow alley, the dark young man with the fierce eyes, and he fought them but he did not draw any weapon.

Curt had no time for pleasantries. He leaned over and struck the young man hard on the side of the jaw, and pulled the limp body up before him.

"Out of the city," he said to Otho. "This way, toward the hills. After that we can talk."

They found their way out of the maze of alleys into a broad avenue spanned by massive arches, broken now, their heroic carvings shattered by the slow hammers of time. Curt and Otho sped beneath their shadows, alone with the wind and the blowing dust.

Beyond the arches there were no more buildings but only the straight road that ran into the hills between two rows of ancient stelae, stark and rigid under the glow of the great planet. Beyond the stelae there was nothing, only the gaunt slopes and the sighing in the stiff dry grass.

There had been no alarm behind them and there was no pursuit. The warning night was blank and still. Captain Future led the way at random until he found a place that suited him. Then he stopped and motioned Otho to dismount.

The young man was conscious. Curt thought he had been conscious for some time but he had made no move. He was breathless now from the jolting of the beast. He crouched where Curt had set him, shaking his head, gasping.

Presently Curt asked, "Why did you open the paddock gate?"

The young man answered, "Because I did not wish for you to die."

"Do you know why we were supposed to die?"

"I know." He looked at them and his eyes were hot and angry. "Yes, I know!"

"Ah," said Curt Newton. "Then you do not worship the Second Life."

Otho laughed. "He doesn't need rejuvenation."

"It is not rejuvenation," said the young man bitterly. "It is death, the death of my world and my people. Almost before our beards are grown the Second Life take hold of us and we forget the first life that we have not yet lived. Our walls fall about us stone by stone and we have not cloth to wrap our bodies in and the great change in other worlds does not touch us—but all that is nothing so long as we live the glorious life, the Second Life!"

He sprang up, glaring at Curt and Otho as though he hated them, but it was not their faces he saw. It was the sere and sterile faces of men grown old before their time, dead men on a dying moon.

"You of the other worlds are not like us. Life goes forward for you. Men learn and grow and the fields are rich and the cities are bright and tall. Even your oldest worlds have young minds—is that not so?"

Captain Future nodded. "It is so."

"Yes. But on Europa what is there for a young man? Dust and dreams! There

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is a wall against us and after a while we learn that we cannot break it down. Then we too grow old."

He turned away. "Go back to your own world. You have life. Keep it."

Curt caught him by the arms. "What is the Second Life?"

"Death," said the young man, "to those who live it—and to those who would destroy it. We know. We have tried."

A sharp light came suddenly into Curt Newton's eyes. "Then there are others in the city who feel as you do?"

"Oh, yes—all of us who are still young." He laughed. It was not pleasant laughter. "We banded together once. We went up to the valley, angry, full of hate—we were going to make our world free. And they shot us down in the pass—the old men shot us down!"

He shook himself free of the Earthman's grasp. "I have told you. Go back to your own while you still live."

"No," said Captain Future softly. "We are going to the valley. And you will guide us."

The eyes of the young man widened. He stepped back and Otho caught him from behind, holding him helpless. He turned his head from side to side and cried out, "Three men, where a hundred of us failed? You don't know Konnur, the Guardian of the Second Life. You don't know the punishment. I am a proscribed man! I am forbidden the valley!"

"Proscription, punishment!" Curt Newton's voice was heavy with contempt. "You don't deserve your youth. Your bones are already crumbling." He reached out and slapped the young man's face, lightly, deliberately, one cheek and then the other.

"You will guide us to the valley. After that, you're free to tuck your tail and run. We can end the Second Life without such help as yours."

Captain Future saw the flame of anger leap in the young man's eyes, the dark flush in his cheeks. He strained against the android's grip and Curt laughed.

"So there's still a bit of pride left if a man can find it! Set him up here, Otho." He swung up onto the scaly back of his mount and received the Europan between his arms, where Otho lifted him as though he had been a child.

"Now," said Curt, "which way?"

The young man pointed.

They rode on through the dark hills, and after awhile the dawn came and found them before the shadowy throat of a pass—the dawn of pale far Sun that was only a little lighter than the night.

Curt dismounted and stood holding the bridle. He said to the Europan. "Go back to the spaceport, to the Patrol base. Tell those who wait there for us where we are."

A gleam that was almost a light of hope began to show in the young man's eyes. "And you?" he asked.

Curt nodded toward the blind notch of the pass. "We are going in."

"Perhaps," whispered the young man softly, "perhaps it is true that you can end the Second Life—you and those who wait for you. We know of you even here, where we know so little. I will go. And after I have said your message I will go into the city to gather those who fought once and who can fight again!"

CAPTAIN FUTURE let go the rein. The young man wheeled the squealing beast around and sent it flying back toward the city. Otho's mount ran with it.

"Let us hope," said the android dryly, "that our boy doesn't come to grief along the way."

He turned and walked with Curt up into the darkness of the pass.

"If the Second Life isn't rejuvenation, what is it?" Otho asked. "Some kind of pleasure-dream by artificial sensory stimuli? No, Ezra wouldn't stoop to that."

"No, it isn't that," Curt said. "I'm beginning to think that it's something more pitiful and terrible than that."

It was quiet in the pass. The screes of broken rock rose up on either side, with here and there a stunted tree. An army might have hidden there and been unseen but even Curt's keen ears could

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detect no sound of life.

And yet he was not surprised when, as they reached the end of the pass, he looked back and saw men closing in behind them.

He waited for them. They were youngish men and strong but in their eyes already was the shadow of decay. He could see why the young Europan had called these "the old men" too.

"I have come to speak to Konnur," Captain Future said to them.

The one who seemed to be the leader nodded. "He is waiting for you. You will give us your weapons, please."

They had weapons of their own and there was not much point in arguing. Curt and Otho handed them over. Then they walked on and the men with the old eyes came close behind them.

The valley was deep and there were forests in it and a thin stream. Not far from the pass was a massive house of stone, very long and wide, that looked as though it might have been a place of learning in the days when the moon was young.

"There," said the leader, and pointed to a gateway of which the valves were fine-worked gold, bright as the day they were hung there. Captain Future passed between them with Otho at his side.

Inside there was the soft gloom of vaulted chambers, cool and dim, with old flagged floors that rang hollow under their striding boots. The great house was only a shell of stone, stripped of all but its enduring bones. It was empty and very still.

They waited and presently a man came walking toward them down a long passage, a tall man, erect and very proud. An aging man but not dusty, not decayed. His eyes were bright and clear, the eyes of a fanatic or a saint.

Looking at him, Curt knew that he was faced with the most dangerous kind of an enemy—a man with a belief.

"You are Konnur?" he asked.

"I am. And you are Curt Newton and—ah, yes, the one who is called Otho." Konnur made a slight inclination of his head. "I have expected you. The man Gurney was afraid the girl would send for you in spite of his message."

"And where is Gurney?"

"I will take you to him," said Konnur. "Come."

He led the way down the long dim corridor and Curt and Otho followed. Behind them still came the grim-faced men.

Konnur paused beside a massive door of some tarnished metal and pushed it open.

"Enter," he said.

Captain Future stepped through into a long low hall that might have held a regiment. And he stopped with a queer chill shiver running through him. Beside him he heard Otho catch his breath.

There was a stillness on that place. Above it and below it and through it was a sound, a deep and gentle humming that only made the silence greater.

Spaced along the hall were many slabs of marble, mortuary couches hollowed deep by the pressure of uncounted bodies. Above each slab there stood a cowled machine as ancient as the marble, of a manufacture utterly foreign to any prosaic mechanism of Earth. They had been kept bright with loving care but even so a number of them seemed worn out and useless. It was the machines that made the humming, the whirring song of sleep.

Men and women lay upon the slabs. Curt lost count of their numbers in the uncertain shadows. They lay as though in slumber, their limbs relaxed, their faces peaceful. Around each sleeper's head was bound a strap of some unfamiliar metal, having round electrodes fitted to the temples. The electrodes were connected, not by wires but by tendrils of glowing force, to the hooded mechanism above, from which a somber light poured down.

Otho whispered, "There they are—all the old ones who have disappeared from other worlds."

Old men, old women—the sad, the burdened, the careworn. They slept here on the ancient slabs and Curt saw that in their faces there was more than peace. There was happiness, the joy of young days when the sun was bright

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and the body strong and tomorrow was only a vague mist on the horizon.

There were many Europans also and they too had found happiness under the humming machines. But in their faces was reflected a different joy—a lofty pride as though behind their closed eyelids passed visions of magnificence and strength.

KONNUR beckoned. "Here your friend lies sleeping."

Curt stood beside the slab, looking down into the face of Ezra Gurney. The familiar face that to Curt was almost that of a father—and yet it was not the bleak face he remembered. The grimness was gone, the scars of time and pain had softened. The mouth smiled and it was the smile of a young man, a boy who has not yet lost the laughter from his heart.

"*Waken him!*" cried Curt.

And Konnur said, "Not yet."

Otho asked, "But—is it all illusion? Is he drugged or dreaming?"

"No," said Konnur. "He is remembering—returning—*reliving*. Everyone has times within his life that he would like to live again. The man Gurney has recaptured the period of his youth. He *is* young. He walks and speaks and feels, reliving every action as he lived it then. That is what we call the Second Life."

"But how?" said Curt. "*How?*"

"These instruments of the ancients," said Konnur, "enable man to remember—not just as a vague flitting vision but to recall with every one of his senses so that he completely relives the remembered experience."

Curt began to understand. Each experience left a new neural path in the synaptic labyrinth of the brain and the brief retraveling of that path roused a partial passing re-experience that was called "memory."

The Twentieth Century psychologists had speculated long ago that what they called "redintegration" might seize upon one single remembered impression and evoke from it all the many sensory impressions of which it had formed a part. The subtle probing rays of these machines accomplished "redintegration" in the fullest sense.

"And the memories of the fathers lie buried in the brains of the sons," Konnur was continuing. "Those parts of the brain formerly thought purposeless are a great storehouse of ancestral memories, inherited through some unimaginably subtle change in the chromosomes that even the ancients could not understand."

"So that you can reach back through those layers of buried inherited memory?" exclaimed Curt. "How far back?"

"Far and far," Konnur replied. "Back to the days of our world's glory, indeed—and is it wonderful that we prefer to live in the great past of Europa and not in its sad present?"

Captain Future said soberly, "But that is a rejection of the only real life. It is a retreat, a dying."

"Yet it is glory and triumph and joy," said Konnur.

His hand reached out to touch the humming mechanism. There was something reverent in the gesture.

"We do not understand these machines that give us the Second Life. The ancients had the knowledge and it is lost. But we can duplicate them bit by bit. You will see that many of them are worn out, beyond repair. We needed rare metals, the radioactive substances that are the core of the machine.

"They are found no longer on Europa and so we needed money to buy from other worlds, to build new machines. That is why we brought these people here." He nodded to the aging folk of Earth and the other planets who had come to Europa to live the past again.

Captain Future faced Konnur. He spoke almost in the words of the young Europan.

"This is not life but death! Your cities are crumbling, your people are wasting away. This poison of the Second Life is destroying your world and must be stopped!"

"And," asked Konnur softly, "will you stop it?"

"Yes! I have sent for the other Futuremen and behind them are the

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Patrol—and some hundreds of your own people, Konnur, the young men who prefer to live one life rather than to die in two."

"It may be so," said Konnur. "And yet who knows? The man Gurney came here to stop it. He changed his mind. Perhaps you will change yours!"

Curt gave him a look of contempt. "You can't bribe me with memories of my youth. They're too close behind me—and most of them were not pleasant."

Konnur nodded. "I would not attempt anything so childish. There are other memories. The whole System knows of your long struggle to delve into the ancient past, the lost cosmic history of mankind. *You, yourself, can live in that past. Through ancestral memory, you can live again in the days of the Old Empire—perhaps even before it.*"

He smiled and added slowly, "You have a thirst for knowledge. And there are no limits to the learning you might acquire in the Second Life!"

Curt stood silent and there was a strange look in his eyes.

Otho laughed, a peculiarly jarring sound. "There is nothing in this for me, Konnur. I had no ancestors!"

"I know. The guards will care for you." Konnur turned to Newton. "Well?"

"No," said Curt, with a curious harshness. "No! I won't have anything to do with it."

He turned and there was a solid phalanx of men against him, barring his way. Konnur's voice came to him softly.

"I'm afraid you have no choice."

Irresolute, with a whiteness around his mouth, Curt Newton looked from Konnur to the guards and back again and a tremor ran through his muscles that was more of excitement than fear.

Otho sighed.

The guards moved forward one short step. Curt shrugged. He lifted his head and glanced at Konnur, challenging him, and Konnur pointed to an empty slab.

Captain Future lay down, in the hollowed place. The marble was cold beneath him.

Another man had come, an old man in a threadbare gown who stood ready at the controls of the machine. Konnur set the metal band on the Earthman's head, fitting the chill plates of metal over his temples. He smiled and raised his hand.

The machine came humming into life. A somber glow illumined Curt's face and then two shining tendrils of force sprang out and spun themselves swiftly downward.

They touched the twin electrodes. Curt Newton felt a flash of fire inside his skull and then there was the darkness.

CHAPTER IV

The Unforgotten

ONE by one disjointed far-separated slices of his past suddenly came real and living again to Curt Newton. Each one was farther back in the past. And he did not just remember them. He *lived* each one with every one of his five senses, with almost all his conscious being.

Almost all—but not quite. Some inner corner of his mind remained aloof from this overpoweringly vivid playback of memory, and watched.

He was striding with Otho and Grag and the gliding Simon upon a night-shrouded world. In the heavens flamed the vast stunning star-stream of Andromeda galaxy and out of the darkness ahead of them loomed the mighty Hall of Ninety Suns. . . .

He was in the bridge of the *Red Hope*, Bork King's ship. That towering Martian pirate stood beside him and the brake-rockets were crashing frantically as they came in fast, fast, toward the red sullen sphere of Outlaw World. . . .

He was running, running toward the ships. The whole world beneath him was rocking and shaking, the sky wreathed in lightnings and great winds moaning. He was back on Katain, that

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lost world of time that was rocking now toward its final cataclysmic doom. . . .

"*Back farther—farther—*" whispered the faraway voice, and the humming note of the machines seemed to deepen.

"You will do as I say, Curtis!"

Curt stood, rebelliously facing the implacable gaze of Simon Wright, in the corridor of the Moon-laboratory under Tycho. He was only a fourteen-year-old boy and he felt all a boy's resentment of restrictions, of fancied injustice.

"All I've ever seen is this place and you and Otho and Grag," he muttered. "I want to go to Earth and Mars and all the other worlds."

"You will someday," said Simon. "But not until you are ready. Grag and Otho and I have reared you here, in preparation for what is to come. And when the time arrives you will go. . . ."

He could not see very clearly nor could he understand. He had only an infant's eyes and an infant's mind.

It was the big main room of the Moon-laboratory. A man and woman lay sprawled on the floor and other men with weapons stood over them.

Simon Wright, his lens-eyes facing those men, was saying tonelessly, "You will pay for this very quickly. Death is coming now."

There was a rush of feet. Grag and Otho burst into the room. A terrible booming cry came from the metal giant and he leaped forward.

To Curt's infant eyes it was a whirl of staggering figures, a spurt and flash of light—and then Grag standing with Otho over the broken bodies of the men.

The scene darkened—but the aloof untouched corner of Curt's adult mind knew that he had seen the death of his own parents and their avenging by the Futuremen. . . .

"*Back beyond his own memories!*" whispered the voice. "*His father's and his father's father's. . . .*"

He was in an ancient 20th Century airplane. Curt felt—*felt*, even though he knew it was a 20th Century ancestor who had really felt it—the pressure as he swung the plane around to dive toward its target. . . .

He was on the sun-parched deck of an old sailing-ship, becalmed, its sails hanging limp and dead. He started toward the stern . . .

He was one of many men, men clad in bronze and leather, carrying long spears. They were running into a rude village of huts and somewhere there was a shrieking . . .

Under a somber sky on a sere brown hillside he stood as a skin-garmented savage. The chill wind ruffled the dead grass but he saw the movement down on the slope that was not of the wind and he raised his heavy stone axe more alertly. . . .

"*Farther—*"

Thunder shook the night sky and reverberated across the city of glittering pylons in the nearer distance as one by one the great liners came swinging majestically down.

Curt Newton—or the faraway ancestor whose memories he now relived—spoke with casual interest to the grave robed man who was walking with him toward the starport terminal.

"We'll see what kind of officials Deneb is sending us this time! I must admit these bored sophisticates from the capital, with their patronizing attitude toward our Earth and its System, get on my nerves!"

"But after all we're only a tiny part of the Empire," the other reminded. "Administrators who have to think of worlds across the whole galaxy can't consider our little System as too important."

"It *is* important! Even though it has only nine little worlds it's as important as any part of the Empire!"

"Perhaps it will be someday. The Empire will last forever and someday—"

EVEN as the scene changed the watching corner of Curt's mind knew that for a moment he had actually *lived* in the legendary Old Empire. . . .

"*Back farther still—farther—*"

He could hear them singing the song through all the ship. The old song that

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was like a banner streaming, the song that they had sung for generations in the mighty ships that went on and on through the intergalactic void.

"How many, many centuries since the last of the First Born died—the First Born who raised us from the dust! How many centuries since we men went forth!"

He heard and he looked ahead through the port and there was nothing but the same eternal scene—the vast maw of oceanic deep space with the hosts of the far-flung galaxies mere drowned points of light.

All except the one galaxy ahead, the mighty wheel-shaped continent of stars that slowly, slowly, kept growing into a universe of fire and splendor.

"By the arts that the First Born taught us, by the sacred behest that they laid upon us, we go forth to create the cosmic dream they dreamed!"

The blinding revelation came only to that little part of his mind that was still Curt Newton—the revelation of that first epic coming of men to found the Empire of old, to fulfill the command of the mysterious First Born.

If he could hear that song a little longer, that marching-song of the elder human race as it followed its destiny from far beginnings! If he could hear but a little more—

"Now!" spoke the voice and light crashed destroyingly upon the whole scene—and he was Curt Newton wholly and lying upon a cold slab and waking—waking. . . .

It was cruel, that awakening, unendurably cruel—to have gone so far and yet not far enough! He heard himself cry out, an incoherent fury of demand for the machine to hum again, to send his memories plunging back along the endless track of time.

Then his sight cleared and he saw Otho watching him, his green eyes calculating and ironic. He saw Konnur, smiling.

Curt stripped off the metal band and stood erect. His hands were unsteady and somehow he could not meet Otho's gaze. He tried to speak but the words did not come and in his mind, already fading, was still the burden of that song and the blinding light of galaxies untouched and new, ready for the conqueror.

He shivered and Konnur said as though he knew quite well what was passing in the Earthman's thoughts, "Remain here then. You can order the others away and remain here and follow your own dream. There are no limits to the memory of man."

"Yes," said Curt to himself and not to Konnur. "One limit—the beginning, the time before ever there were men, before the First Born. Who—and where and how?"

"Learn," said the quiet voice of Konnur. "Send the others away when they come and remain and learn."

From a great distance then there came to Curt the sudden sound of fighting in the pass.

For a moment he stood motionless, caught between that song of lost eons and the pitiless present. Then, savagely, like a creature driven against his will, he moved. He tore the metal band from Ezra Gurney's head and shook him and shouted, "Wake up, Ezra! *Wake!*"

The guards had started forward. Otho said sharply, "Wait! If you touch him now, it will only mean complete destruction for you all."

Konnur listened to the sound of fighting in the valley. He sighed and motioned the guards to halt.

"Yes," said Konnur, "let us wait. There is always time to die."

Ezra Gurney was looking up at Curt, his eyes bewildered and full of uncomprehending pain.

Captain Future turned away. He said heavily, "Konnur, go and tell your people to lay down their weapons. There is no need for bloodshed."

"Perhaps," said Konnur, "it would be better for us to die fighting for the Second Life."

Curt shook his head. "The Second Life must be ended for Europa. By bringing in these folk from other worlds you have give the Planet Police and the Government power to act and they will

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act very swiftly. But . . ."

Konnur's eyes blazed. "But?"

"It need not be destroyed. Go now and speak to your people."

Konnur hesitated. His gaze was fixed on Curt's. Then, abruptly, he turned and went away. Curt took Ezra Gurney's hand. He said gently, "Get up, Ezra. It's time to go."

The old man got slowly to his feet and then sank back, sitting on the edge of the slab, his face between his hands.

PRESENTLY he said, "I couldn't help it, Curt. It was a chance to go back to the time when I was young, to the time when we were together and all that had not yet happened . . ."

Curt did not need to ask whom he meant by "we". He was one of the few who knew Ezra's tragedy, the loved brother whom he had long ago been forced to slay as an outlaw in space.

He took hold of Ezra's shoulder. "Sure," he said. "Sure, I understand."

Ezra looked up at him. "Yes," he muttered. "I think you do. Well . . ." He stood up, groping for something to say, something normal and expected. "Well, I guess there's nothing else to do but go and face Joan. Is she angry?"

"Not now," said Otho, grinning, "but she will be!"

Ezra smiled back gratefully but his heart was not in it.

They went out of the place of the sleepers, down the long passage to the outer chambers. The noise of strife had ceased. They heard a tumult of many voices shouting and then Grag came striding mightily through the tall gates.

He bellowed, "Are you all right, Curt? I knew Otho would get you into a jam!"

Simon Wright glided beside him and behind them a press of eager dusty young Europans crowding like wolves.

"Shall we destroy them now?" they shouted. "Shall we break the machines?"

"No!" Curt told them. "Hold your tempers! And listen. Konnur! Where is Konnur?"

They thrust him inward through the crowd. They had handled him roughly but even so he had not lost his dignity nor his pride. He stood waiting.

Curt Newton spoke slowly, so that everyone should hear and understand. "This is my proposal. There are many of the old ones who have lived so long in the Second Life of memory that without it they would die—and the secret itself is too valuable to be lost.

"Therefore I offer this solution—that the machines shall be removed to one of the small uninhabited moons of this system and that those who wish to shall go with them. It would be a sort of quarantine, under the authority of the Planet Police, and the Second Life would be gone forever from Europa. Does that meet with your approval?"

He looked at Konnur, who had no choice and knew it, but who did not care as long as his beloved dream was safe.

"It is well," he said. "Better than I had hoped."

"And you," demanded Curt of the young Europans, "what is your word?"

"They had many words among themselves. They shook their fists and argued, hungry for destruction, but at the last the young man who had come with Curt and Otho from the city stepped forward and said, "As long as the Second Life goes forever from this world we will not oppose you." He paused, then added, "We owe you that much. If it had not been for you we would never have broken free."

Curt felt a great relief, greater than he should have had for the mere saving of a bit of antique science. Again he avoided Otho's gaze and even more the cold penetrating glance of Simon Wright's lens-eyes.

He said to Konnur, "It is done then. Waken the sleepers and let them have time to think and choose. I will see that the arrangements are made to transship and settle all those who wish to go."

He took Ezra by the arm, shaking him from the reverie into which he had sunk again. "Come on," he said. "We're finished here for good."

* * * * *

They were walking across the space-

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port, the six of them, the Futuremen and Joan and Ezra, heading for the ships under the red glow of Jupiter. And Simon Wright said something that had been on his mind to say these days during which Curt had labored to finish the removal of willing exiles to a remote and barren moon.

"Was it out of pity for them, Curtis—or did you wish to live the Second Life again yourself some day?"

Curt answered slowly. "I'm not sure. It's too dangerous a thing to meddle with overmuch and yet—much knowledge could be gained that way. If a man could be sure of himself, of his own mind . . ."

He shook his head and Simon said dryly, "The last thing a man is ever sure of is the strength of his own mind."

Otho looked up at Grag.

"But you really ought to try it some time, Grag."

"The Second Life?" rumbled Grag. "Why, now, come to think of it maybe I should."

"Certainly," Otho told him. "It would be a fascinating experience to learn how your ancestral pig-iron felt in the forge."

Grag turned on him. "Listen, android—"

Curt's voice cut them short and their step quickened as they went on toward the ships.

But Ezra walked last, slowly, the shadow still on his lined old face as he looked back—back to the remembered past, the bright lost days, the forever unforgotten.

To Sleep, Perchance to Dream . . .

JOHN CAREY, pioneer spaceman, had been quick-frozen in deep space for centuries when Curtis Newton and the rest of the Futuremen found him in the wreckage of his derelict ship and brought him back to life. Shortly afterward, sickened by the crass corruption of the Earth to which they carried him, Carey wished he had been allowed to sleep on forever.

But other elements existed in civilization—elements fighting hard as ever against the static evils of overindulged civilization—elements still reaching for the freedom of the stars. And among these elements Curt Newton and his little group of followers played as always a vital role.

It did not take long for them to find a job in which Carey's long-dormant crusading instincts could have full rein—a job that meant danger, new frontiers and actual combat against the agents of human decay. You'll find out about it when you read EARTHMEN NO MORE, another in the new series of Captain Future novelets by Edmond Hamilton, appearing in our next issue!

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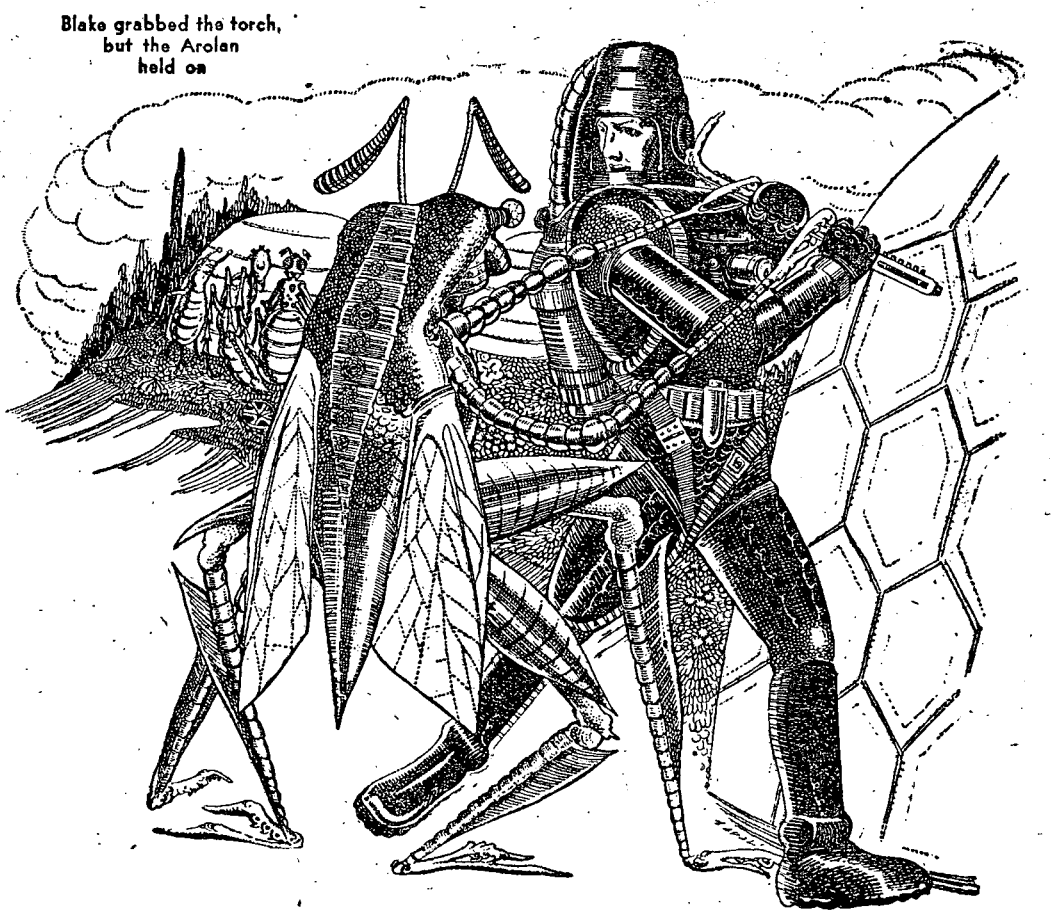

Blake grabbed the torch, but the Arolan held on

CRITERION

By ROBERTSON OSBORNE

Perhaps Dooley and Blake could repair their spaceship—but could they keep those strange, tiny inhabitants from puttering with it?

LIEUTENANT ARTEMUS DOOLEY tried to play it safe, as instructed. The important thing was to avoid risks, to return to Earth with the information he and Ensign Perry Blake had spent dangerous months in getting. With knowledge of the Orion Group's impending attack, the Solar Federation could lay a defensive trap —the only hope against a more powerful enemy. And the only way to get that warning through undetected was to flit homeward in an innocent, unarmed old two-man tub, looking as inconspicuous as possible.

Hence, Lieutenant Dooley slipped his

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little vessel back into normal space cautiously for a look-see. He kept it hovering near the third planet of blue-white Ramah, with even the radar shut off, while Ensign Blake took a final bearing on far-off Sol. Dooley listened intently, trying to pick up the drive-hiss of an enemy ship, while his earphones crackled with cosmic static. Beside him, Blake completed the sight and switched on a mosaic scanner to search for anything moving among the stars.

Both men jumped as the scanner alarm buzzed. On its screen, red lines bracketed a dull, shifting sparkle that grew rapidly brighter.

"Meteors coming at us!" exclaimed Dooley. He lunged at the controls to hurl the ship away from the deadly swarm. The tough old vessel bucked and dodged, but suddenly there was a vicious little *chirk!* and then two more.

The Puncture Alarm began to yowl as air hissed out. As the pressure dropped, automatic airlocks thudded shut and the Air Alarm added its jabber to the confusion. The two men closed down their helmets.

Somewhere aft there was a muffled explosion. The drive went dead; the ship was dark. Emergency lights came on, to show Dooley grabbing a red lever.

"Strap in, Perry!" he barked. "We'll have to ride her down and try to break the fall with jets."

Listening critically to the emergency jets as they warmed up—BLAM! BLAM! blaaaawwwooee—Dooley tried to reckon the chances of survival. Relative velocity, three miles a second toward the planet; height, 130 miles; deceleration, four G. There'd be a chance, he figured. Just a chance. Turning to the young ensign, he warned: "This won't be like space-drive, Perry. Try to relax."

BLAKE nodded, looking out the port with worried brown eyes. As the acceleration shoved him into the seat, he said: "I've read about this planet, Art. Pretty bad."

But Dooley's attention was on the controls. A thin screaming announced the beginning of the planet's atmosphere. The shriek grew louder, dropping in pitch, becoming a deafening wail even through the double hull. Dooley muttered angrily as the hull-temperature gauge climbed into the red. He fought the ship into a long, flat glide, but she pitched and yawed stubbornly.

The seconds ticked by, with the wail changing to a terrible roar, as the planet's surface inexorably neared, took on detail, blurred and rushed past. . .

The ship struck viciously, at a tangent, and bounced. It struck and bounced again, plowed a quarter-mile furrow through the brush, and finally shuddered to a stop, blistering and blackening the purplish vegetation.

* * * * *

Doggedly the two men fought their way back to consciousness. Dooley, his left arm and shoulder smashed, found himself being dragged toward the airlock. The heat, even inside his space-suit, was almost unbearable.

Letting him sag to the deck, Blake wrestled with the airlock. "Stuck," he gasped. "Try power room." The two men floundered through the chaos of the power room to find the second airlock hopelessly jammed.

"Stern launching tube," suggested Dooley, tugging at the interlock. Blake swung open the inboard and outboard doors of the space-torpedo tube, crawled through, and dropped to the ground, standing by to catch Dooley. The lieutenant fell awkwardly, though, and fainted when he struck the hard ground.

Blake dragged him through burning vegetation to a sheltering ravine. He manipulated the lieutenant's chestplate controls, giving him more oxygen, squirting water on his face through the drinking tube.

Dooley blinked, groaned, and sat up. He managed a feeble wink, though his face was gray with pain. "We got down alive, anyway," he said. "How bad is she, Perry?"

The ensign stood up to look at the ship, which was shimmering and making metallic little noises as it cooled.

"Not so good," he answered. "The hull doesn't seem to be weakened much, but the inside looked like a mess." He squinted brown eyes at the wreck. "What happened, anyway?"

"Must've got a short in something from a chip when those meteors hit." Dooley pulled his good arm in from its sleeve to rummage through his inner

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pockets. "The parawave circuit probably formed a standing loop somewhere and shorted out. I've seen 'em do that, when the monitor circuit failed." He swallowed a pain-killer tablet. "We'll probably find one of the tank circuits, or even a junction box, fused into junk." He reached up inside his helmet, feeling a cut on his scalp. "You say you've read about this planet?"

Blake nodded. "Arola's Planet. Named after a Martian explorer, killed in rescuing a pleasure-craft in the region. It's—not a good place, Art."

Dooley stood up, weak and dizzy. "Eh? Why not?" He looked around. "Oh. Purple vegetation. That means—um—methane atmosphere? Ammonia?"

"Worse than that, in this case. Ten percent hydrogen cyanide. One little noseful, and you don't even struggle." Davis helped the lieutenant out of the ravine. "There isn't much more information. No mineral surveys yet. No intelligent life known, except maybe some insect-like things with tools that one party reported seeing. Big beetles, maybe: the report was vague."

THE two men made their way around the ship, inspecting the outer hull. Dooley thumped it with an armored fist. "This old girl was one of the first per-steel ships built," he said. "They really made her tough. I see a few sprung plates, but the main beams are probably all right. The hull isn't so important, of course, as we can live in our suits. But weakened beams are likely to throw the drive out of line, or fold up."

Limping around the stern, he stared wonderingly at the long gouge through the brush and dirt. Then his eyes squinted skyward, and he instinctively ducked into the shadow of the stern fins. "Better try to get an airlock open, now that she's cooled a little, Perry. We're wasting time."

Blake scrambled into the launching tube and disappeared. After a moment there was a thumping and clanking; the power room airlock squealed open. Dooley held up his good hand and the ensign helped him into the ship.

"First thing," announced the lieutenant, "is to get an idea of the damage. You can climb in between the hulls, while—" He banged his shoulder on a projecting bar; the pain made him sag weakly against a bulkhead.

"Let's take care of that shoulder first," Blake said, catching him. "You won't be much help this way."

Dooley nodded. "Have to hurry, though. A lot depends on us, Perry!" With the ensign, he made his way through the jumble of equipment wrecked when a transformer had slammed across the power room.

In the control room, the two men sealed the hull punctures with battle patches and let the airpumps flush out the cyanide. Then, with the airlight a safe green, they shucked off their heavy suits.

The ensign broke out the medical gear and gave Dooley a shot of Selectol 22 while the diascope warmed up. When the damaged arm and shoulder were numb, he wheeled the instrument over, set it for "Bone," and brought it to bear on the shoulder. A splintered clavicle stood out clearly on the screen. Moving the instrument, Blake scowled at a broken humerus. "Collar bone and upper arm, Art. That calls for an airplane splint."

Lighting a cigarette, Dooley shook his head. "Couldn't wear my space suit. Better just strap the arm to my chest and put on a cast. The surgeons at Main Base can take it apart again later."

In half an hour the quick-set cellulith cast was hard and the scalp wound had been dressed. Dooley swallowed another anti-shock capsule, plus a double dose of biocalcium for the mending bones. He walked around the control room, twisting his body and getting used to the cast. "Let's go, laddie," he said then. "You climb into the bilge and check the power leads. I'll do what I can inside."

Blake helped him into the rubberized metal-fabric suit. The two men valved themselves into the power room. Blake was undoing the dogs on a bilge-access manhole when Dooley stopped him. "Listen!"

Blake turned up his audio pickup gain. He stared wide-eyed at Dooley.

"You hear it too, then," the lieutenant murmured. Moving quietly to look out the open airlock, he beckoned for Blake to join him.

Even to an old-timer like Dooley, the scene had an unreal, nightmare feeling. Space travelers get used to strange forms of life—some even claimed the deep-sea life of Earth itself was weirdest of all—but at least the members of

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a group usually look somewhat alike. This was a group, obviously, in front of the ship. To be exact, it seemed to be an orchestra. But no two members were alike.

Dooley squeezed his eyes shut and tried again, but the strange music went on and the group looked just as improbable.

"Welcoming committee of Arolan natives," murmured Blake, sounding as if he were about to giggle. "Look, they make those sounds themselves, without instruments. And some of 'em have four legs, some six. There's one with no legs at all." He glanced at Dooley's drawn gun. "Surely they're friendly, Art! After all, if so many different kinds of them can get along peacefully—huh?"

"Maybe." Dooley's characteristic caution was evident now. "But we haven't time to establish full contact. I suppose we ought to show 'em we're friendly, but we'll have to let it go at that." He studied the insect-like Arolans. "Try the Standard Basic Contact Procedure. I'll cover you."

BLAKE climbed down slowly, careful to make no sudden moves. Holding his empty gloved hands out to the sides, he walked to within ten feet of the serenaders. The music continued.

After a long, awkward wait, Blake murmured into his microphone: "They won't stop to listen. What now, Art?"

"I dunno—that isn't in the book. Maybe they're waiting for you to say something."

Blake uncapped the thin metal diaphragm in the throat of his helmet. "How! Me two-fellow friend along you plenty-fellow. What-fellow chief b'long you? Him speak, me listen."

The wailing and thumping continued. Dooley snorted. "What the lickens have you been reading, Perry? You'd better study some Basic and let those magazine thrillers alone!" Climbing down stiffly, he limped over to the group. With great dignity, he addressed a four-foot Arolan, the largest one there.

Five minutes later, Dooley was red-faced and angry, having been utterly ignored as he talked, shouted, scratched marks in the dirt, and waved his one good arm. Blake managed, somehow, to keep a respectful straight face.

The lieutenant was muttering bitter comments when, abruptly, the music died. The "musicians" left, being immediately replaced by another group of Arolans. These, somewhat smaller, carried devices which could have been tools or weapons.

The two men waited, motionless, guns ready. The natives began to examine Dooley. When one of them prodded a bruised thigh, the lieutenant involuntarily jerked away. He was promptly abandoned in favor of Blake. The ensign backed away warily, and immediately found himself ignored. The Arolans headed for the ship.

"Hey!" exclaimed Dooley. "Up the ladder, quick!" He scrambled up after Blake, shutting the airlock.

"Funny," said Blake. "As soon as we moved—"

"No time for that," Dooley interrupted. "Climb into the bilge. They might get in through a rip in the hull."

"Should I shoot 'em?" Blake was crawling through the manhole, after switching on the bilge lights.

"Not unless you have to. Carry on with the damage survey while you're in there." As Blake's answer was scarcely audible, Dooley added: "Better plug into an intercom connection. Radio won't carry through the hull."

The lieutenant plugged into a phone socket, letting the reel on his back take up slack as he wandered around the power room. He couldn't do much with one arm, but he put away some of the gear spilled from burst lockers, disentangled wires, and traced out connections.

He was examining a one-hand soldering job critically when Blake's voice interrupted. "Hey, Art! They're coming in through a sprung plate!"

Dooley ran to the open manhole, tugging out his gun. He heard a metallic tapping, and saw a four-legged Arolan climbing among the girders, hammering and apparently listening. Dooley's jaw dropped when he saw a second creature shaving off little samples of persteel as though the extremely hard metal were cheese. Others followed, using various little tools. One seemed to be measuring, while the other—Dooley felt certain—was memorizing the arrangement of girders, cables.

"They don't seem to be hurting anything." Blake's voice jarred the lieutenant out of his fascinated stare. "Shall I just keep an eye on them?"

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Dooley hesitated, while one of the Arolans gazed at him with emotionless, glittering black eyes. Far more than the lives of two men, he knew, hung on his decision. The ship was virtually helpless, and the Arolans were an unknown quantity.

"Yes," he answered finally. "Be careful, Perry. I can't figure out what they're up to."

The many-jointed creature facing him moved forward slowly, like a wary, giant spider. Dooley felt the hairs on his neck rising. If the things only acted hostile, at least he'd know something about them. But the way they just stared, and refused to communicate, worried him.

HE waited until the Arolan tried to climb along a girder into the power room. He pushed it back, firmly. The thing almost slipped off the girder. Regaining its footing, it started to climb in again with calm indifference. Dooley rapped it warningly with his gun. Drawing back, the creature suddenly sprang at him. It struck his chest plate with surprising force, knocking him aside. Swearing, Dooley whirled to see the thing examining the room, paying him no attention.

At that moment a globular one slipped in behind him. While Dooley kept his gun on the two creatures suspiciously, they clambered around the wreckage, occasionally picking up loose objects for examination. The lieutenant began to notice a pattern in their poking about. They followed wires patiently, played a thin pencil of violet light on the panels that hid circuits, and examined damaged parts with obvious interest.

"By the Rings!" Dooley muttered. "It must be!"

"Did you say something?" came Blake's voice.

Dooley began removing circuit-access panels. "Perry, these critters are intelligent, all right! They're tracing circuits, and I believe they can tell the difference between damaged parts and good ones. Though how they do, when they've never seen—" His voice faded away.

"I was about to say they're doing it here, too." The ensign sounded strained. "But I have bad news, Art. The oxygen—main supply and forward reserve are both gone. Punctured. All we have left is the after reserve. Five days' supply."

Dooley looked bleakly at a handful of tangled wires. "Eight days, if we live in our suits. And we're six days from home." He frowned at the wrecked equipment, gloomily estimating the days it would take to get the ship barely running with a minimum of repairs. "How's the hull?"

"It'll do. But you made a good guess about the circuit. A surge looped across the junction box in back of the control desk. There's fused cuprosilver and insuloid all over the inside. Some mess! I can't even get the cover off; one of the hull plates is stove in against it."

Dooley squinted blue-gray eyes, thinking. "We could jury-rig the controls. But that would mean drilling through the persteel deck—with hand tools! Take at least a day for that alone." For the hundredth time, he wondered why BuShips didn't make their design engineers serve a couple of years aboard a ship. He heard a clatter at the manhole, and turned to see Blake climbing through.

"I think I can by-pass that j-box," the ensign said. He was hooking tools onto his suit when he caught sight of the two Arolans. "Listen, Art, why not let me have another try at communicating with these fellers? They seem to have some technical knowledge. Maybe they could help, even if they are hard to get along with."

Dooley shook his head. "No time, Perry. We'd have to establish direct communication first. Then we'd have to find a working vocabulary, explain how everything works, what's wrong, and how to fix it. And then they'd have to figure out how to do it. We'd lose weeks on it. They probably think in an entirely different way. In fact, it might even be impossible to communicate with them!"

The younger man's eyebrows went up. "Impossible?"

"Sure. Even the greatest experts have never been able to communicate with the Altair Six creatures, though they're obviously friendly. Both sides have tried, but we just don't have the same sense impressions, or something."

A startling crash of thunder shook the deck. Both men ran to look out a viewport. Brilliant blue lightning split the air again, leaving a snaky trail of soot as the HCN broke up. More thunder followed. A sheet of rain came sweeping

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across the purplish landscape.

There was silence in the ship. Dooley realized the Arolans were gone. Presently he saw them scuttling away through the brush along a faint trail. In the distance, a tree fell before the wind.

Blake began gathering his tools. "Notice how surprising the thunder is? This planet seems to be almost entirely silent. He clambered through the manhole.

TWO hours later Dooley crawled up laboriously to sit beside him. Blake was sweaty inside his "Iron Maiden," cramped in the small space, and angrily frustrated. He had broken two hacksaw blades, tangled his foot in a blob of molten insuloid, bashed his mouth against his helmet, and fallen headlong into a tangle of girders, among other troubles. And he had repaired just one control lead of twenty-four vitally necessary. He tried to grin cheerfully, but didn't succeed.

Dooley looked things over. "Pretty tough," he agreed. "I'm going to fix a little chow, Perry. We haven't eaten for almost a day. Come down in about five minutes. And incidentally, I've managed to get the warning ircuit running on battery power, so at least we won't be taken by surprise if an Orion Group ship finds us."

After crawling down again, he let himself into the control room, opened some ration cans, and let them heat. He was putting away spilled charts when his eye fell on the astrogation 'scope. He glanced into the eyepiece casually.

He was still staring into it when Blake entered. "Look here, Perry," he said. "What do you make of that?"

The ensign looked. "Seems to be a metal hemisphere, with a few Arolans around it. Might be a hive, huh?"

Dooley rubbed the back of his neck and looked doubtful. "Might be an incubator—too small to be a hive It's about six feet high, and some of the natives are a good four feet." He swung his chair around. "Well, let's forget them and eat." His long thin nose wrinkled in annoyance as he picked up a can of synthesized chicken. "Blindfold test or not," he mumbled, mouth full, "I still don't like this stuff!"

Later, having sopped up the fragrant gravy with a hot canned biscuit, he saw Blake grinning at him. He laughed then, relaxing for the first time in a week. "All right," he admitted. "I was born in Twenty-Sixty-One, and this is Twenty-Ninety-Six, and I'm old-fashioned. Okay."

They were fastening their helmets when they heard a noise. "The Arolans are back!" exclaimed Dooley. The ensign ran after him into the power room.

"Nobody here," said Blake. "Hey! Where's the protontorch?" He looked behind the parawave "tank." I had it up here!"

"There!" Dooley pointed through the viewport. "One of those bugs has it. Must be heading for that dome we saw."

The ensign swung open the airlock and grabbed a blast rifle from a wall clip. Dooley took another gun, saying: "I'll cover you from here."

Blake, lumbering along in his heavy suit, caught up with the creature beside the dome. He grabbed the torch, but the Arolan held on. The unexpectedly heavy weight threw Blake off balance. He fell against the dome, grabbing futilely for a handhold on the smooth surface. His weight dented the thin metallic skin only slightly, but the reaction was instantaneous. Three other natives, previously motionless, launched themselves at him in unmistakable attack. He moved his head back instinctively, just as something collided with the back of his helmet. He fell, stunned.

By radio, Dooley heard the ensign's grunts, the *clunk!* on his helmet, the pained gasp. "Perry!" he called. "Blake! Are you all right?" Silence answered him. Swearing, blaming himself, he hobbled down the steel rungs and hurried toward the dome with his rifle ready. Several Arolans passed him. He glared suspiciously at them, but they paid no attention. He got to the dome just as Blake was beginning to sit up.

"What happened?" the ensign inquired feebly. He sat up and shook his head.

"I dunno, but it looks like you're all right. Can you stand up?" Dooley helped him up. "Where's the torch you came after?"

BLAKE looked around, then pointed. An Arolan was backing out of the dome, carrying the missing tool. Starting for the ship, the creature seemed to see the two men. It dropped the torch at Blake's feet.

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"I remember now; all of a sudden they jumped me, and I got knocked out. What made them do that?" The ensign sounded bewildered. He examined the torch, which was undamaged. "All I did was lose my balance and dent that hemisphere a little."

Dooley stared at the dome's bent surface, absently trying to scratch his chin through the helmet. His attention was attracted by a column of Arolans moving toward another hemisphere, glittering in the brush a hundred yards away. There were still other domes, he saw now, scattered far up a hillside. He picked up his blast-rifle.

"You go on back," he said. "I'll snoop around a little." He waited until Blake had reached the ship, then made his way to the second hemisphere.

He found it partly crushed by a fallen tree, which was being cut up and removed by a number of Arolans. A separate group of the insect-like creatures stood nearby, making only an occasional feeble, spasmodic movement.

Up close, the metallic shell of the dome seemed to be a skin grown from a pulpy layer just beneath. Dooley studied the exposed, quivering interior. There were hollow spaces, and little veins from which bluish stuff dripped, and— He stooped for a closer look. Yes, there were metallic filaments and tubes, several clumps of crystals, a network of glittering wire, and a kind of woody structure linking everything.

It didn't make sense, in Terrestrial terms. Maybe it produced eggs, or gave birth to the Arolans. It could have been a pet. Or even a food ource—if it were alive at all. At any rate, the insects were busy caring for it. Some of them, Dooley saw, were suturing the torn parts and connecting broken wires. Others were setting up a device looking like a health-lamp of some sort.

Well, Dooley reflected, limping back, it explained their familiarity with wiring. Maybe. Though what kind of a thing that dome was— His meditations were interrupted by a call from Blake.

"These critters are up to something, Art!" The voice in his earphone sounded dazed. "I'd tell you about it, but you ought to see it yourself."

Dooley could guess, though. The Arolans would be trying to patch up the ship, acting on blind instincts as they did with the domes, and would soon be making an even worse mess with hundreds of wrong connections.

He was partly right, he found, as he clumped into the power room. The insects *were* connecting broken leads. He grabbed a heavy wrench to drive them away, but Blake intervened.

"Look, Art, wait a minute. I checked in the bilge, and they'd already connected a jumper on the next lead around the j-box. And insulated it. I came down here, and—look! These connections are *right!*"

Incredulous, Dooley looked. Position indicator fed from the arbitrary centrix and the flight integrator, right! Parawave generator through modifier into wave tank and drive. That was right too.

"It can't be," Dooley mumbled. "But obviously it is!" He saw at least a dozen Arolans at work, looking like strange gnomes, intent on their obscure busyness. All were snipping, welding, and getting spare parts out of the lockers.

Bewildered, the two men let themselves into the control room and opened their helmets for some "fresh" air. Dooley got out his favorite pipe, of translucent ruby-wood from Rigel II, and gathered his wits while fragrant coffee heated.

"Wish I could figure this out." He shook his head in wonder. "These Arolans have no cities, no vehicles—as far as we know—and yet they're at work as if they had." He blew a smoke-ring and stared at it unseeingly. "I guess we'll have to take the Truth Test, as Liang and Sarapati did, to prove we didn't make it all up."

OVER at the table, Blake was pouring coffee. "What happened to them?"

"Well, they were the first to land on Beta Orionis Six. Their ship had hardly grounded when it started coming apart under them. In twenty minutes the whole thing was just about dismantled. Turned out the natives thought it was another puzzle from their fifth-planet friends. They were apologetic about it, and put the ship back together in thirty minutes or so. When Liang and Sarapati left, a few days later, the natives asked them whether they knew of any really *difficult* puzzles."

The younger man cocked a suspicious eyebrow, but Dooley's face was inno-

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cence itself. There was a short silence.

"What are these Arolans after, Art?" Blake asked finally. "They could be planning to seize the ship; they certainly don't act as though we mattered at all. Or maybe they're learning how to build a ship. They might have a war in mind, for instance."

"I've been wondering," Dooley admitted, sipping coffee. "We'd better keep a sharp eye on them. Maybe we should have tried to keep them out. But that would have taken a lot of time and attention. And besides, our situation would be hopeless without their help. We might have a chance, this way." He stood up, rubbing his eyes wearily. "I wish we had time to get a little sleep. It's been—"

He was interrupted by an alarm bell, clanging furiously. It settled down to a steady ding-ding, ding-ding, as the detector identified two hostile ships. Dooley, reaching the controls first, switched on the screen. The two men stared grimly at a pair of red dots.

"Cruisers," said Blake, flicking a glance at a row of smaller screens. "They must have noticed our drive radiation when the meteors hit us. They're bound to pick us up, Art. We'd better take to the brush, huh?"

The lieutenant pursed his lips. "This soil is iron-bearing. I don't think their radar will pick us up."

Blake busied himself gathering weapons and jungle gear. "If they do land," he said, "maybe we can capture one of their ships."

But the enemy didn't land. Dooley watched the two red dots grow smaller until the detector lost them. "They've a hunch we're in this region," he decided. "Let's hustle, Perry. We'll run trace-current tests on whatever we can."

Blake let himself into the power room, plugged into a phone socket, and began checking the temperamental parawave circuit with its pseudo-resistances, dynamic capacitances, and fantastically tricky standing waves. All the circuits repaired so far seemed to be all right, but there was a lot left to fix. Blake began doing what he could to help the busy Arolans, and Dooley even let some into the control room.

Night came, and the work went on. It was daylight again before Blake, looking dazedly for a mislaid meter, realized he needed something to wake him up. He lurched into the control room, where he found Dooley pale and bleary-eyed.

"Better get sleep," the ensign croaked, falling into a seat. "I'll stand watch."

Dooley scowled vaguely, fighting to stay awake. "No. I'm senior officer. You—" His head dropped; he slept. Blake made coffee, smoked, and kept himself moving, somehow. Two hours later he woke the lieutenant, and immediately yielded to sleep.

Before midday, both men were working again. The Arolans apparently had not stopped at all. Dooley was sure some of them had been working a full day without showing fatigue; their endurance seemed remarkable.

LOOKING around Blake saw him staring at them. "Art," he said, "I wish you'd let me try to establish contact with them."

"What for?" asked Dooley bluntly. "We might find out why they're doing this, and we could thank them. But that's assuming we wouldn't waste time doing it. Besides, I have a little hunch we'd actually lose ground by communicating with them."

"Huh?" Blake showed astonishment.

"Why did they ignore us when they saw us move? What does the ship mean to them? What are the domes?" Dooley gazed through the vitroid viewport. "I think I have the answers. You try working them out independently." He chuckled. "Look. Out there by the fin. They're going to treat the old girl's aches with a health-lamp."

He pointed to several Arolans, setting up three little projectors like those near the damaged hemisphere. It occurred to him to watch the devices to make sure they weren't dangerous. But they were not switched on, and he turned to other tasks. He tried to work calmly, and not to worry about the desperate importance of hurrying. Years in space had taught him the life-saving value of quiet efficiency and the futility of panic-stricken haste.

Four hours later, taking time out to rest his one good arm, he glanced idly into the telescope eyepiece. The damaged hemisphere, he saw, was now a dull gray, like the ship's hull. The Arolans around it were gathered in a semicircle, apparently serenading. The telemicrophone picked up a wailing dirge.

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A moment later the "heat lamp" facing the dome was switched on. A beam of green light reached out—and began to slice through the dome. Dooley's jaw dropped as he saw heavy boulders also being sliced up behind the dome. He ran to a viewport and found the projectors beside the ship still unattended.

He jabbed at his phone connection. "Blake! Those aren't health lamps out there! They can destroy this ship. Keep a close watch on those critters!"

Blake's voice was quiet and alert. "They're still working here, Art. What's up?"

"They just sliced up a dome and some big boulders with one of those things. Those projectors are far better weapons than anything we have—or the enemy either!" After a moment, Dooley added: "Here's some information for you to think over, Perry. When the domes are badly damaged, beyond repair, they change color, and they're cut up. May be part of a reproductive cycle."

It was late afternoon when Dooley noticed a sudden silence. Blake's voice came over the phone. "They've left the ship, Art. Gathered outside. Looks like a serenading beginning."

Dooley moved fast. He stood in the open power-room lock with Blake, blast-rifle ready, while the Arolans shrilled a rhythmic, strangely moving chant. There was silence, then, for a few minutes, as if the creatures were waiting, and the chant began again. There was no activity near the three projectors facing the ship.

Dooley lifted his good shoulder. "Guess they're not ready for the slicing ceremony. Let's get busy."

He was back in the control room when an idea hit him between the eyes. Things suddenly made sense. He ran to the vitroid viewport in alarm. Sure enough, the projectors were being tinkered with. Dooley flipped the phone switch on his chest. "Perry! They *are* going to slice us up!"

There was a clatter in the power room. "I'll blast 'em!"

Dooley looked around the control room desperately for inspiration. "No, no! Not unless they actually begin. They mean well, Perry." His eyes chanced on something. He snapped his fingers. "Got an idea. Stand by!"

He hobbled over to the Outside Speaker microphone, used in loading operations. He carried it over to the little music player and switched on both instruments.

BEETHOVEN'S Fifth Symphony came booming from the outboard speaker. Wedging the microphone into the player cabinet, Dooley limped back to the viewport. The Arolans had abandoned the projectors to stand in a semicircle as if listening in awe.

Blake's astonishment was audible. "I don't get it, Art!"

"Never mind. Stand by for a quick check!"

The power calibration, usually a two-hour procedure, was run through somehow in twelve minutes. Blake gauged four rotors simultaneously by ear, threw switches with both hands and one foot, estimated dial readings, and made adjustments all over the room. The shape of the parawave trace on the oscilloscope made him shudder, but he knew it would grab space, and that was good enough.

"Looks like we've got enough to run on; let's try it," Dooley said at last. He fed power slowly, feeling out the ship's equilibrium, wincing as she bucked. The drive groaned as he held the ship just off the ground.

"Perry!" he barked. "Think you can swipe one of those cutter-beams?"

"Wow!" There was a clatter of activity in the power room. A moment later, an airlock slammed. "Let's go home, Art!" the ensign yelled. "I got it!"

The ship lifted perkily at first, but the speed picked up and the drive smoothed out as Dooley expected. It was good enough to get the ship home.

In the power room, Blake took a moment to switch on the stern astrogation 'scope. He found the scene of the crash, already twenty miles down, and switched to high power, vaguely hoping to see a wistful group of insects staring upward. But the atmosphere was too wavery, and he gave up. He adjusted a rheostat absently and spoke into his chest mike. "Art, what was it all about, anyway?"

Dooley's chuckle was sympathetic. "Puzzling, wasn't it? Well, we've just seen sheer engineering genius demonstrated. And we made a mistake by applying the wrong criterion. So did they."

"I can see the genius part. You mean

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the Arolans make, or at least repair, the domes, and from that much they figured out how to fix the ship, eh?"

"Almost, Perry. Think a minute. Why did they cut up the dome, and then start in on the ship?"

"Well, the dome evidently didn't work any more, and they thought the ship didn't either, although the vital parts had been repaired."

"Right. The hemisphere was dead. And they thought the ship was."

There was a pause before Blake answered.

"Dead? The ship?"

"Sure. That accounts for the serenade. They hoped for an answer. They thought the ship was alive and intelligent, and needed help. That's why we'd have lost time if we'd shown them that you and I were the intelligent ones; they'd probably have lost interest then."

Blake sounded bewildered.

"But then—the domes?"

"That's right. The *domes* are the intelligent life. We made the mistake of assuming the 'insects' were, because they moved. The reverse mistake was made about us."

Dooley's voice carried the certainty that he'd found the explanation. "The mechanical things we called insects are manufactured or grown in various convenient shapes by the domes, and simply act as extensions or robots. That planet actually has no moving form of life!"

After a long silence, Blake spoke. "Those domes aren't even animal life, by our standards. I wonder what they'll think of us?" He sighed, staring thoughtfully at the cutting-beam device. "I wish we could thank them."

He pondered the matter a long time, while the little ship flew through hyperspace—toward home and the laying of a gigantic trap.

THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from Page 6)

speakably menacing A-bomb situation carries its own melancholy answer.

Actually science fiction can play and perhaps is playing to some extent a far more important role for such of humanity as it reaches than the mere foretelling of gadgets, great and small.

One of the more recently noted and most vital factors in modern thinking and adjustment to life is the so-called "emotional lag." This is in effect a sort of non-material time-warp, which finds the bulk of us, in an era of sudden and constant and cosmic change, thinking and feeling and therefore existing in the past.

It is an affliction that applies especially where it is most contagious, where it can do the most widespread harm—among those men of middle age or more who have won success and leadership in our politics, our professions, our industry. For it is natural to wish to listen to men and women who have proved themselves capable of rising above the norm in such matters—whatever the norm is.

Unfortunately it is equally natural for those who have attained success and prominence to seek rationalization of their attainments through maxims, rules and principles—even though the conditions to which they originally applied may well have altered beyond recognition or even have vanished without trace.

Horse-and-Buggy Minds

Certainly we still have the horse-and-buggy mind with us—though not in such quantity as a decade ago. Today, so rapid has been recent human material progress, we are afflicted simultaneously with the railroad, the trolley car, the automobile, the airplane and the space-rocket mentality. The resulting confusion has made a mass ailment of the stomach ulcer, turned psychiatry into big business and caused our lunatic asylums to burst at the seams.

From the settlement of Jamestown and Plymouth to the beginning of the present century it was possible for most of us to live with reasonable fulfillment within the tenets laid down by the local pastor and schoolmaster—or, if the latter were lacking, by parental and grandparental precept. The rules were simple and, when followed, worked fairly well for most.

The few who saw or attempted to see into the future, or delved into the true origins and functions of the then-current credo, were for the most part unable to reach the conforming mass of the populace at all. They were generally suppressed or reviled as crackpots or simply ignored until, after

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their deaths, their insights were made pitilessly clear by subsequent events.

Today, if we are to survive as a civilization or even as a species, each of us who can must begin early to question every maxim handed down to us in home, church or school. We must consider constantly that such maxims, far from being divine, were created by men out of living experienced under definitely limited sets of conditions and experiences. We must consider constantly whether such conditions, such experiences and therefore such maxims are in any way applicable to the present.

Change is Constant

Having made our own rules we must constantly re-examine them to make certain that they are not already passé. In short, we must accept continual and ever-increasing change as the only constant in the world that surrounds us.

This is a task intensely difficult for a species whose indolence causes it generally to dislike change almost as much as it dislikes thought itself. Hence the mass desire for escape from reality, in reading, in sports—in all the sorts and forms of entertainment.

The western or detective or romance story addict flees his fractionally-comprehended environment in favor of a world better suited to the longings of his reverie—that half-world of the imagination in which visions are created without aid from the conscious mind. Such escape is usually beneficial when not overindulged in—it can give fresh perspective to stale intellects, relax overwrought nerves, offer the benefits of a long weekend with none of the fatiguing rigors or expenses.

Those who seek such escape through science fiction, however, have opportunity to profit further through their flight. For it is a basic function of stf to build its stories on speculation. They are reared on possibility—past, present or future—rather than on symbolic distortion of reality.

What could happen to any one of us who finds himself selected as a mind-contact for the probing of alien investigators? If we achieve artificial travel faster than light, would our individual mass exceed that of the universe—and would we make our return to yesterday or the day before? What if the flying saucers really are scouts of extra-terrestrial origin?

These are the very stuff of science fiction—and all are based on speculative thought. It is on such speculation that true prophecy is founded, rather than on mere description of gadgets to come. Furthermore, it is only through such speculation, that we can hope to keep inwardly abreast of our constantly altering environment. If science fiction breeds such speculation, as it must, then it is far more than escape literature.

We find far more encouragement for stf in the recent widespread editorial comparison of the dialectic illogic of Yakov C. Malik at Lake Success last August to that of the chief propagandist of the late George Orwell's *1984* than we find in all the gadgetorial foresight of Messrs. Verne, Lambchop, etc. For here was science fiction playing its truly prophetic role!

A GLANCE at the type-size in which the letters immediately to follow are printed should be sufficient preparation for the shock to come. In the interests of the continued good eyesight of those who read this column we are at last trimming ship.

It is our hope furthermore to produce a better organized, more provocative and far more adult letter section than ever before. We shall, to an even greater extent than in the past, welcome letters of ideas, of constructive criticism and of controversial topics—as long as they have some remote connection with stf.

Humor—sure. But let's be certain there is more laughter than groans in its reader reaction. Personalities—fine. We'd all be lost without them. Verse—why not? But let it be either extremely good or dreadful bad. With which—let's go.

PAST AND PROBABLE
by Rick Dykeman

Dear Editor: Gather 'round li'l chillun and let us consider a fascinating subject sometimes called science-fiction, though more familiarly known as stf, with regard to its past and probable future.

No authority on the subject and all of its ramifications (for which thanks to Mr. Webster. Noah, that is), I nevertheless have been indulging in it for some years and have of late been—shush—thinking about it.

Here, without preamble or commercial (that comes later) are a few pithy observations anent the subject.

The literature of science-fiction has, as we are all aware, undergone a streamlining over a period of years which has sufficed to make it acceptable reading matter to both the slick

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publications and the general book publishers, as well as enabling its pulp audience to read same without being accused of degeneracy and/or semi-illiteracy.

Except for the art-work, which has lagged lamentably behind the times, the better pulp markets publish stuff which is often clean, intelligent and adult. Of course you have to bring an open mind to the reading of stf. You cannot read it to scoff. But that is another subject.

The old-timers, to whom science-fiction was new and far less restricted in treatment, wrote with a vigor and enthusiasm that should put many a modern-day author to shame. They didn't try to treat the far future with the same blasé touch which distinguishes much of the fiction in other fields.

In the fiction of ten to twenty years ago you will find a certain degree of overwriting, of disregard for credibility or motivation, true. But what you will find in this fiction of yesterday, is a certain quality of awe, of Wonder, which made it first-rate escape reading. This is not largely true today. Today's science-fiction writers too often tend to be blasé, to treat such themes as the far future or distant worlds and dimensions with a fine disregard for that quality. And in so doing they lose much of that which distinguishes stf from who-dun-its or other crud.

I, for one, would rather read a simple story about the first spaceship off-Earth landing on Mars or the dark side of the Moon and human reactions to same (see R. Bradbury) than a far-future story which quietly, almost unnaturally, accepts everything from interstellar flight to aliens from another dimension in the same way that we today accept the Hottentots of Africa or supersonic flight.

Therefore, I feel that stf may be in grave danger of getting ahead of itself and defeating its own purpose. After all, when a reader gets to the place where absolutely nothing is new or stimulating to him anymore, what possible reason can he have for reading stf?

If you want plot, action, etc., you can find it, and in much stiffer doses, in any good detective or spy story. Or maybe even—shudder—a Western. But the average reader reads (well, you can't deny that!) stf because it affords more intense and effective escape value than the other fields.

All of which brings us right down to one thing. Namely, that the purpose of science-fiction, as I see it, is not to bring the far future or the remote reaches of space down into our laps so that we cease to marvel at same, but to give us, as well as man's imaginative and descriptive powers are capable, vivid glimpses into times and places which most of us will never live to see, but which effectively serve to relieve the tedium of today and perhaps give us something to work toward.

The day that man reaches the stars—in a large body—is probably not within our lifetimes. But we can imagine how it will be. And we can lay the foundation for the day when a later generation will achieve what we can only visualize.—*Church Street, Brooktondale, New York.*

We find ourselves in at least partial agreement with your ultimate conclusion as to the purpose of stf, Mr. Dikeman. However, it is our hunch that far future, far space and the far past also have their places in the field.

In short, any story—from pure fey to a pure inversion of science tale—has a place in science fiction as long as it holds for a fair proportion of its readers, some of that stuff you mention earlier in your epistle—"a certain quality of awe, of wonder. . ."

There is room for humor, fantasy, romance, drama and heavy science—as long as each is well and convincingly conceived and written. It is our very definite belief that any attempt to narrow the limits of the field is correspondingly to weaken it. Perhaps its greatest strength is its variety.

You object to the blasé or underwritten approach—thereby revealing a somewhat lamentable fondness for the "purple patch" authorship that is supposedly behind us by the time we pass from grammar school. However, it is possible to underwrite a story, just as it is to overwrite—and the results in their different fashions are equally painful. We'll try to ensure that this does not become a habit.

VIEWPOINTS AND MAGAZINES
by Robert Parker, Radio Editor, University of Connecticut

Dear Editor: May a fan of the "good old days" come back into the fold? It's been almost seven years since I penned my last fan letter, closed the cover on STARTLING and took myself off to give Uncle Sam the benefit (?) of my wondering mind. Since that time, science-fiction and I have been strangers to one another until the last few months, when my imagination finally squirmed its way out from under the "don't think for yourself" blanket the army had wrapped around it. It's good to be back—and good to imagine again.

Viewpoints and magazines can change a lot in a few years, especially those from the 'teens and into the 20's. Mine has; the old space opera story has lost its appeal, while the "think" stories have come to the front.

While we're talking about coming to the front, I'd like to talk for a moment on the change in SS. Sure, you're still putting out adventure yarns to sell the magazine—any fan who can't realize why you do this doesn't do much thinking. The general reading public wants escape literature, we're all a bit Walter Mittyish at heart, and that's what you've got to give them in order to sell circulation and keep your advertisers.

But—and this is the change in SS as far as I'm concerned—there's a new tone to the stories (most of them). The formula has been tightened and the plotting is generally better. When you finish a story, there's the glow of satisfaction you usually get from a good yarn, *and* there's also a stirring of a few imagination cells to make you think about what you've read. Enough of this, except to say SS is much better than it was, may it ever be so.

I want to mention the letter section. Thank

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God that the Old Sarge has gone to his well-deserved end. Science-fiction will never reach the place it deserves until the Milton Berles of fandom have left the scene. The current letter section is good, except for the doggerel which passes as verse at times. The first couple of poems are entertaining and the rest—ugh! —*Box No. 39, Storrs, Connecticut.*

Curiously enough, in view of your closing comment, we are verseless this time out. Hereafter we shall really seek to run only those poems that offer a little something more than a frenetic effort to get random words into some sort of rhyming pattern. Yes, and that goes for us too.

For the rest of your epistle, we can only be grateful. You show not only appreciation of our development in recent years but also insight and understanding of some of the problems which continue to face us. We shall do our utmost to live up to same.

When you mention the Walter Mitty in most of us you are plumbing the problem of reader identification with the characters in the tales we publish—one of the most intriguing of all editorial problems. Incidentally, via the sensipsych, it is a problem Raymond Z. Gallun has tackled almost to its ultimate conclusion in his current novel, PASSPORT TO JUPITER. Like anything else it *can* be overdone—but a story, especially a long story, is lost without it.

WE DON'T REMEMBER
by Bill Morse

Sir: Was it not yourself who, some months back, expressed coy surprise at the use of the term "literature" in regard to stf? At the time I was uncertain whether you were showing false modesty or an inferiority complex. Now I am convinced it is the latter. You seem content to have TWS and SS fill a mere stepping-stone role for Hamilton, Bradbury and Co. (to whom I raise my cap in humble admiration).

Shame on you, sir (and murmurs of "prostitution of one's art"). Surely an editor can exercise some control over the make-up of his product. Using better paper, trimmed edges and a rather more conservative cover, you could extend circulation enough to make up for the increased costs. Maybe we should present a petition to the publisher.

CYBERNETIC BRAINS gave me a nightmare. What a story! Your last three lead novels easily prove the claim of literature. Just one thing—which rises from both Raymond Jones and the Coles—how can one make "use" equal "potential"? It should mean that the owner of a size 8 hat is brighter than the owner of a 6½—but often means the opposite. How come? Jones uses a species of shock treatment to get full use of the brain. How do the Coles propose to do it with a brain in its more customary surrounding?

We seem to have more humor than usual this month—and a good thing, really, after the nightmare quality of the Jones novel (gimme more, though, please!). Magnus Ridolph is—himself. Good. Matt Lee's 'lorum I suspected for no good reason. I was delighted to find I was right.

Cream of the shorts, for me, was Mack Reynolds' tale. What a blow for the pompous paunch of humanity! Beware, the flying saucers are watching!

Somehow Cap Future didn't go down so well this month. Either the absence of Grag from most of it or your own suggestion that Hamilton is none too keen on the series spoiled it. It seemed more like a pot-boiler than, say, CHILDREN OF THE SUN. And, according to Bonestell and Ley, Titan's atmosphere is frozen on its surface.

THE ENERGY EATERS kept up the humor standard of the shorts. Somebody borrowed the idea a few years back for one of your chief rivals—imitation is the sincerest form of flattery (sometimes).

You know, if SS keeps up this standard, you'll be forced to improve the format (even Bergey is better). So perhaps a readers' petition won't be necessary.—*W.E.E. (RAF Signals) RCAF Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.*

Maybe we were a bit coy about our literary standards recently, Bill—we really don't remember, however. On the other hand, we have gone to bat for the high literary quality of fantastic literature any number of times. Virtually every author of any real achievement has turned his hand to fantasy—ranging from AE (THE AVATARS) to Israel Zangwill (WE).

For the rest, we're glad you enjoyed the Jones "brains"—although we remain mildly confused at your confusion over hat-sizes—and will do our best to make a readers' petition unnecessary. How do you like Bergey's Jupiter on this cover? If you go for this sort of thing—as well as for his space-scene on the February TWS, for Pete's sake write us to that effect. We'd like to use interplanetary or galactic scenes more often than in the immediate past and approving letters will help make it possible.

DOWN THE RIVER
by Frank Smith

Dear Editor: I see by the September issue of SS that you've got hold of one of Mack Reynold's stories. It was good. Get some more. I understand that Reynolds is new to the writing game. Despite this he has a technique that some established authors might well envy.

There was a note of grim irony in his story, "Down The River." Just imagine, the imperialists and racists of this little sand-mote planet of ours suddenly informed that they in turn are to be exploited and jim-crowed by a galaxy-embracing interstellar empire! It would be funny if it were not sober truth that millions of human beings are fated to suffer and die cruelly as long as imperialism and racism continue to divide the world.

The theme is not unworthy of the serious attention of stf writers. Just what would galac-

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tic visitors think of man and his works? Does the question give any ideas to the authors in the house?—*612 Banner Ave., Brooklyn 24, N. Y.*

Inevitably, Frank, we shall find out—as ultimately will yourself. There is plenty of room for the satire, the parable and the allegory in stf—*if* and as long as such themes do not dominate the human or alien values of the story. In such instances we come up with sermons bearing a trim of fictional anecdotes rather than true fiction.

NEOPHYTE
by Ronnie Miller

Dear Editor: Although this is my first letter I am no newcomer to the ranks of stf. I have been reading it for the past three years and I think your magazines are just about the best! With this letter I enter the ranks of active stfans, so needless to say I want to join a fan club somewhere close to me and would very much like to have pen pals write me. All letters will be answered.

Santa Ana is a pretty big town but I have yet to see another real honest to goodness fan. Ah, how I envy those people in New York who go mad from seeing fellow fans and club meetings and conventions and the like.

While reading through the Sunday papers Wednesday, I came across a story on how a couple of men from "Destination Moon" dressed in their space suits, dyed their faces red and went parading about the streets of a town in New York (what was I saying about NY a while back?) to see what the public reaction would be. Wha hoppened? Nothing!

The few people who did notice them laughed theirselves silly. I wonder what would have happened if they had hauled out a ray gun or two and shot theirselves a citizen for a purely scientific purpose. The National Guard would probably been called out and maybe even an A-bomb or two. The newspapers would have read: INVASION FROM OTHER WORLD. Oh, well. . .

Your editorial was read and digested, very good as always. The stories were wonderful, as always. By the way, let me fall on my knees and worship Raymond F. Jones for his masterpiece. Edmond Hamilton I will adore for his THOT—wonderful. The rest were average but good—on the whole an above average issue of STARTLING.

And as the sun sinks slowly in the east, we wave a fond farewell to the Hof, and may it find its way into FANTASTIC STORY QUARTERLY.—*507 Eastwood Ave., Santa Ana, Calif.*

Good luck with your fan existence. It seems to us that there are a number of other actifans in your more or less immediate vicinity. As for the DESTINATION MOON folk parading around in their space suits, we believe this has been part of the regular promotion for that excellent film.

They may even have tried it here in Manhattan—though we remain doubtful. Such exploits have met with discouraging public response ever since, during our revolution, a captured American officer on city parole, donned his full regimentals and paraded Broadway from City Hall to the Battery and back again without even being stopped by a British or Hessian sentry. By so doing without molestation he won a sizable wager from a British officer who had made the bet in a tavern.

Actually, what with swarms of varicolored British army and navy uniforms in the city, to say nothing of the numerous Loyalist regiments, the Jaegers, the Walloons, the Brunswickers and the other German units, many of whom wore blue) it does not seem such a feat.

COVERED
by Joe Gibson

Dear Editor: A brief note about—of all things—the cover on the Sept. Startling. I'm thinking Bergey was rushed to get this one done; he copied Lawrence's interior illustration. But ya know sumpin'? It's good! Good!

It has one good quality that makes it the best cover you've had in years. See if you don't agree—throw it across the room and then look at it from a distance! It's attractive, eye-catching, just what you want in a cover illustration. In fact, it's even better than that. Wait a minute—look closely. What is it about that cover that makes it so much more attractive?

You got it! Simplicity. It isn't too cluttered up. But other covers haven't been cluttered, either—The colors! Basically, there's just orange and blue. Just two basic colors arranged in a neatly balanced cover layout. Gads, why hasn't Bergey done this before? Quick, call the Vice-President in charge of art departments! Spread the word! Dispatch coded messages at regular intervals!

According to Lorenzo Sabine, who published his Notes on Duelling almost a century ago, Midshipman Joseph Bainbridge did fight a duel at Malta. Stephen Decatur was Joe's second and suggested four paces, since Joe was inexperienced and the Englishman, fellow named Cochran, was professional. Cochran's second said four paces were murder. Decatur insisted.

The two men exchanged shots—and both missed. On the second exchange, Cochran missed. Bainbridge's ball hit Cochran in the head and gave him a mortal wound. Beginner's luck. In most of the old duels, contestants blazed away without hitting anything. The old flintlock and percussion cap pistols were accurate enough. The men shooting 'em just yanked on the trigger. Those old guns have been tested.

Anyway, thank goodness there's no duelling in this so-called modern age. There are too many men, today, who know how to shoot a pistol. But it's mildly ironic to think about. Seems we're not so much more intelligent today—we're just better savages!—*24 Kensington Ave., Jersey City 4, N. J.*

You're absolutely right about the Bainbridge-Cochran duel—or so military expert Fletcher Pratt informed us shortly after

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our non-accurate version of the incident appeared. It was fought and Bainbridge did win it on the second exchange. Incidentally, this was the same Bainbridge who approximately a decade later commanded the famed U. S. Frigate Constitution against the Java, using the victory to springboard a distinguished Navy career. Hope you continue to approve our covers and what's within 'em.

TO TALK A BIT
by Ed Butenhof

Dear Sir: I'd like to talk a bit about your magazines. I didn't start reading them until about six months ago, even though I've been a science fiction fan for years, because I rated the contents on a par with the covers. I'm happy to say I was wrong. The contents are excellent.

Though I only recently discovered your magazine, I now have a collection complete to 1946 and I am building it up as fast as I can find issues in the bookstores. Your best regular science fiction authors, to my way of thinking, are MacDonald and Jones—the best—and then Vance, Clarke, Brackett, West, Kuttner, Leinster, Bradbury and G. O. Smith in approximately that order.

The best science fiction authors writing for anyone are Heinlein and van Vogt. Once, before the war, I would have included de Camp with these two, but since the war he has written but one decent story, THE HIBITED MAN. Your best stories since 1946 have been AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT, WINE OF THE DREAMERS, SEA KINGS OF MARS and CYBERNETIC BRAINS. Two in 1950—good work.

This will be considered heresy by some but I'd like to cast a vote against CAPTAIN FUTURE. Hamilton's CITY AT WORLD'S END was swell but his CF series is, as others have said, juvenile. I'm glad to see the Hall of Fame out of SS. Can we have some Pete Manx stories in FSQ? ROMAN HOLIDAY was one of the very few good HOF yarns.—*172 East Vista, Daly City 25, California.*

Yes, we have just selected another Pete Manx for a forthcoming FSQ—this one WORLD'S PHARAOH, in which our somewhat subliminal hero is sent back to the days of old Cheops himself. Look for it later on this year.

Your selection of "best" SS novels interests us—we certainly have no quarrel with it but wonder at the absence of Fredric Brown's WHAT MAD UNIVERSE, Charles Harness' FLIGHT INTO YESTERDAY and to a somewhat lesser extent, Hamilton's VALLEY OF CREATION. All had sound virtues and perhaps your collection has yet to encompass them. Also the October, 1947, issue of TWS, with Heinlein's JERRY IS A MAN and Leslie Charteris' THE DARKER DRINK among others.

You'll get a good look at the postwar de Camp in his lead novel for the April, 1951, TWS, THE CONTINENT MAKERS. We find it a short novel both funny and strong in suspense and ingenuity. And hope you will do the same.

You're certainly right about Heinlein and at times about van Vogt—when the latter isn't scattering ideas like buckshot in those infamous 800-word scenes. But thanks to DESTINATION MOON'S success and that of Dianetics respectively, neither is writing much stf. We hope to have a new van Vogt novelet shortly, however.

EUREKA!
by Mrs. C. M. Cooper

Dear Editor: How long has this been going on? These wonderful science-fiction stories, I mean. I feel as if I'd just awakened after a million-year siesta since reading the September STARTLING STORIES. For a number of my 33 years I've been scanning the libraries for stories such as these to quench my thirst. If you have room on your rocket for one fan you can bet I won't be searching any longer as I know the way to the newsstand where SS is sold.

I still wish someone had pinched me about 19 years ago to wake me up to the fact that I was missing a lot of good reading.—*Route No. 2, Cle Elum, Washington.*

If there remain any pinching duties to be performed, please notify us instanter. In which direction, why not take a look alternate months at our companion magazine, THRILLING WONDER STORIES, and, less frequently, at FANTASTIC STORY QUARTERLY and WONDER STORY ANNUAL? Both of these latter are devoted chiefly to re-running the best of the stories from the past. Meanwhile, have yourself a good revel in stf. It can be a heady brew.

NOTE OF APPROVAL
by Don K. Edwards

Dear Sir: Having read SS for a considerable number of years, I thought it about time I sent in a letter of approval. At the present time it is my only source of fiction. I am a student of science at the University of British Columbia, taking Honours in Biophysics, and hence anything pertaining to the wonderful realms of science appeals to me.

I have just completed your September issue and wish to give you my views of the stories therein. I consider the most outstanding to be THE HARPERS OF TITAN—and, running a not-too-close second, THE ENERGY EATERS. Kuttner can always be expected to place near the top.

Brief comment on THE CYBERNETIC BRAINS—the plot was very good but the detail entered into therein tended slightly to drag out the story. However, these are my reactions only as far as I know.

If at all possible I would like to correspond with other students of science.—*559 Harvey Avenue, Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada.*

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You too should try TWS, FSQ and WSA, Donald—and we not only hope you do but hope that you enjoy them as much as you seem to have liked the September SS. Also that you find yourself a slue of correspondents out of the printing of this epistle. Luck with your Honours degree.

OVEROPTIMISTIC
by Noah W. McLeod

Dear Editor: I got the latest number of STARTLING STORIES (the September issue) today, and I read The Ether Vibrates. I consider your point-of-view much too optimistic. You have probably read George Orwell's "Nineteen-eighty-four." I read it in synopsis form in The Readers' Digest. Well, for advanced reading on that subject I recommend General Fuller's *Armament in World History* and Norbert Wiener's *Cybernetics*.

The gist of both books for present-day readers who wish to understand what the World is coming to is in their last few chapters.

General Fuller just about proves that, given the airplane and the radio and a World cut up into sovereign great powers and the existing tension between haves and have-nots, all countries will tend to become rigidly regimented dictatorships. The only difference between country and country being the speed of the process and which steps are taken first.

The radio is a particularly useful tool to warmongers of all colors, from the deepest Red like Uncle Joe Stalin to the purest 'lily-white' like William Randolph Hearst; because it reaches educated and uneducated alike and the human voice broadcast over the radio can carry feelings which the printed page cannot.

The airplane is particularly useful to dictators because it offers a means of crushing opposition before it gains headway. Nero was overthrown when his soldiers in Gaul and Spain mutinied. An air-age Nero would bomb the mutineers into submission before they got started.

The important chapter in the other book is the last, in which Wiener states that by controlling communications a relatively small oligarchy can keep the public confused and divided by false information and prolong its own reign definitely so long as it does not meet with crushing military defeat from the outside.

There is one other idea in the chain. That is that while it is easy to keep the masses quiet by judicious distribution of "bread and circuses," keeping the lower ranks of the official hierarchy contented and in working order is a problem of quite another calibre. And to this problem almost any means will be applied by the dictatorship, even to the expenditure of a large slice of the wealth in military preparation or war.

It looks to me as if the only way to get humanity guided into the path of progress will be a war so severe and so prolonged as to break up the communication system and the social hierarchies in every country of the globe. It seems to me that the Bible predicts such a war in many passages.—*Apt. 2—213 South Union Avenue, Havre-de-Grace, Maryland.*

You may be right, alas—but we hope not. Certainly the events of this century would seem to bear you out. However, there are currents moving in the opposite direction and people en masse—when not roused to the pitch of violence in or out of uniform—are constantly surprising the so-called experts by being a lot smarter than generally believed. Which is why dictators must keep them constantly on the rim of violence.

However, your radio and other instruments for promulgating information or propaganda, constitute a two-edged sword. Especially where the bulk of people are maintained in penury by an oligarchy. We have read General Fuller's book if not Dr. Wiener's, which we intend to tackle when we get hold of a copy.

Actually it seems possible that humanity's sole eventual hope of salvation at present lies somewhere along the road of Dr. Korzybski and the non-Aristotelian conditioned anarchy. Have you delved into that yet, either via A.E. van Vogt or the late Professor Korzybski and his General Semantics? We'd be interested both personally and professionally in hearing from you on it.

ALL-TIMERS
by Lin Carter

Dear Editor: This is sort of an anniversary with me. Best I can remember, it was somewhere around the September, '40, issue I first settled down to getting every copy of STARTLING as it came out. Since then I don't believe I've missed an issue. I've also managed to get back issues so that I now have an almost complete file of ole Ess-Ess. Mind if I reminisce a little?

THE BLACK FLAME: the first novel you ever printed and probably the only real classic. A great yarn, one of Weinbaum's very best.

GIANTS FROM ETERNITY: the first ish of SS I ever read and a story I've never forgotten. One of Wellman's best.

THE THREE PLANETEERS: Hamilton at his best in this period. The story that preceded the Cap Future yarns.

TWICE IN TIME: one of the most unforgettable time stories ever. Wellman's sensitive and colorful story of the man who went back in time, to discover that he was Leonardo da Vinci.

THE FORTRESS OF UTOPIA: Jack Williamson's best for you.

THE PRISONER OF MARS: Hamilton and a great story of interplanetary origins. I still remember those fine Wesso pix.

A MILLION YEARS TO CONQUER: Kuttner.

A YANK AT VALHALLA: Hamilton's first great story for you. A wonderful saga of the Norse Gods and how Ragnarok came.

THE BOTTOM OF THE WORLD: Burroughs' two sons in a fine ERB-type novel. Excellent Coleman Burroughs illustrations.

DEVIL'S PLANET: fine Mars novel in

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Wellman's detective style, his second best for your magazine.

CITY OF GLASS: one of the very best stories you've ever run. The first and only good story Noel Loomis ever wrote for you.

SHADOW OVER MARS: the unforgettable novel that was Leigh Brackett's first around here. One of your classics.

VALLEY OF THE FLAME: Hammond and the issue with my first letter.

THE DARK WORLD: there is not much to say about this great Kuttner classic. One of the finest you've ever run.

THE STAR OF LIFE: Hamilton.

LANDS OF THE EARTHQUAKE: Another of Kuttner's excellent science-fantasys.

THE BLUE FLAMINGO: Bok, not as good as "The Sorceror's Ship" in a competitor, but still superb.

THE MASK OF CIRCE: Kuttner again with a fine Bergey cover and terrific Finlay pix.

VALLEY OF CREATION: Hamilton's poetic and beautiful story of the Brotherhood.

AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT: Arthur C. Clarke.

FLIGHT INTO YESTERDAY: Harness's fine van-Vogt-ish time tale.

THE SHADOW MEN: van Vogt in person and good, tho not as good as "Weapon Shops" in TWS.

WINE OF THE DREAMERS: MacDonald and superb.

THE CITY AT WORLD'S END: not much to say about this great story. Hamilton's best in years and years.

And that is, all in all, quite a list. Twenty-four novels. Not quite in order, perhaps, but still good enough. There have been other great novels, many others, but these were the very best. I think any editor should be proud to have had a hand in the publishing of that list. I hope to see other novels as good, and—why not?—even better.

This latest issue was well balanced. Looks like I smote the nail on the proverbial pate a couple letters back when I expressed my "mildly fervent expectations" of the Jones novel. That was, all things taken into consideration, quite a yarn. Delicious suspense. Fine description of the emotion, the stark terror, a person would feel, knowing his brain was prisoned in such circumstances. That was one story that held me on the edge of my chair till I finished it. Bergey's cover was *unusually* good—for Bergey. I was quite surprised.

Of course, the Hamilton novelet was excellent—can't remember reading one that wasn't. It looks like Ed is going to write a novelet featuring one of the Futuremen each issue—right? This one on Simon was a fine little story—a bit more mood and atmosphere than usual for a CapFuture yarn. Comparing these superb novelets to old Cap novels like "CF and The Seven Space Stones" or "Calling Captain Future"—shows how Hamilton's style has taken remarkable leaps in quality and the tremendous structural changes it has undergone. I'll be looking forward to "Pardon My Iron Nerves."

The latest Magnus Ridolph thing left me cold. The explanations for the numerous disappearances seemed improbable in the extreme. But then I never did care much for old Magnus. This, he whispers, subtly hinting with a proton gun in yer ribs, is one series I can do without.

See where Neil Gourlay wants STRANGE STORIES revived. Your publishing house *does* need a weird-fantasy magazine to balance the solid science in the four other publications. I say yes, if you can get yarns like Kuttner's "Cursed Be The City."—*1734 Newark St., So., St. Petersburg, Fla.*

It seems to us that the weird-fantasy field is being thorough covered by a number of our current competitors. So a revival of STRANGE is unlikely at present. However, thanks for the suggestion.

We are not going to add much to your listings, except to ask—how come no Fred Brown's WHAT MAD UNIVERSE? That was a top job to us. Come to think of it SS has featured quite a list of novels in its twelve-odd years of existence. We are with you in hoping that not only do they keep up in standard but continue to improve.

BACKGROUND PROBLEMS
by Tod Johnston

Dear Sir: Raymond F. Jones appears to be branching out—becoming much more prolific as time goes on. Not so many years ago months used to pass between stories bearing his name. Let us hope that he will continue to be a not too infrequent visitor to the pages of SS. His latest effort, "The Cybernetic Brains" is quite readable. Unfortunately, he closed off the story without going into more detail on the mutual interdependent development of cybernetics and the welfare state.

Jones' problem here, is one of the greatest problems facing the modern S-F author—namely, just how much background is one supposed to insert into stories of the future. A slick author, writing for the Post, never gives it a second thought if his story happens to be one with a modern setting. Such an author just naturally assumes that his readers know all about airplanes and streetcars, and socialism and communism, and capitalism and so on.

The only modern S-F author who has successfully handled this problem is Robert Heinlein in his "Future History" series. I use the word "successfully" in a relative sense only for the problem cannot be said to have been solved successfully until an author discovers a way of setting up a completely new background in a few words so that it will fit into a short story. Personally, I think this is impossible. I think that in the CB Jones bit off a little more than he could chew. Nevertheless, it was a fairly good story.

No comments on the CF stories because I don't read them.

"The Energy Eaters" was enjoyed when it first appeared in the October '39 TWS. To read it again would be to spoil the memories that I have of this fine yarn.

Jack Vance's "Cosmic Hotfoot" is another pleasantly innocuous Magnus Ridolph story. Vance must write these for his bread and butter while writing such stories as his excel-

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lent "World-Thinker," TWS Summer, '45, for pleasure.

Mack Reynolds has gained a certain notoriety for himself with his articles in various writer's mags. It would be better if he kept quiet until he learns a little more about the field. He may have promise but his writings, as exemplified by "Down the River," are definitely not of high calibre.

Who is Matt Lee? "Exit Line" is a very nice job!

In my last letter I said that I was going to compare "City At World's End" with "Five Steps to Tomorrow" and by golly, I mean to do it. I note that you don't like comments on artwork any more but trust that you won't object to a few remarks anent artwork of ten years ago.

Our own Bergey, the incomparable Earle K. Bergey that is, produced his first SS cover for the July '40 issue depicting a scene from Eando Binder's "Five Steps To Tomorrow." Coming hot on the heels of several Rudolph Belarski covers, this cover by a new artist was both welcome and refreshing.

As for the story it illustrated, it was quite good. More a scientific detective story than anything else it was still handled in the old Binder style that has captivated readers for many years. On reading it for the fourth or fifth time however, it just doesn't seem to stack up quite as well as it used to.

Advancing ten years to the Hamilton opus we find our usual Hamilton effort—not too good and not too bad. Extremely readable—an old theme reworked—the usual Hamilton characterization and love sequence—and the old, old happy ending. Carol as the usual martyr making the big sacrifice to the mysterious woman from outer space and so on.

I'll send you a comparison next month of the Nov. '50 issue with the Nov. '40 issue but I can tell you the result now, even without having seen the new mag. Best cover—Nov. '40—why? Because it's the best cover Bergey has ever done for you and it will take some beating. Best story—Nov. '40—why? Because "A Million Years To Conquer" was the first SS novel that I ever read and rereading it at least twice a year has not dulled the thrill that story gave me when I first read it.

Best author—Nov. '40—why? Because ol' Hank Kuttner just happens to be my favorite SS author. I guess from the foregoing that you can gather that the Nov. 1940 issue of Startling means a great deal to me, and you're so right. If you can come up with something that gives it a close run you will really have something.

Not having seen any such offers in SS for some time I presume that you don't allow letter-writers to sell things through the column. Should this not be the case, you might mention that I have four broken sets of *Startling* that I am willing to dispose of at quite reasonable prices.—*P.O. Box No. 32, Postal Station R, Toronto 17, Ontario, Canada.*

Well, we took a look at that November, 1940, cover for SS. Yipe! That's all, brother—just plain little old *yipe!* Comparison of the September Jones and Binder novels interesting as far as it goes. You seem to us unduly pessimistic about the prospect of getting deft and adequate background into stf stories. It can be done—it has been done—read your Bradbury, son. As for Matt Lee, this is a pseudonym for Sam Merwin, Jr.

ON THE ROPES
by Gerry de la Ree

Dear Sir: A couple of months back, just after you published MacDonald's "Wine of the Dreamers," I meant to write and tell you that I thought SS was definitely on the upswing. Your lead novels, especially Daniels' "The Lady is a Witch" and the MacDonald yarn, proved especially interesting.

Somehow I forgot to write, however. The July issue came along and I read Hamilton's "The City at Worlds End." It wasn't quite up to the standard you'd set in the past few issues but I chalked that up to the law of averages.

With the arrival of the September number I was fully expecting a return to normalcy but unfortunately Jones' "The Cybernetic Brains" proved to be a real stinker. I dislike being so brutally frank, but we must face facts, mustn't we?

So now I find myself writing a plea for better novels, whereas just a few short months ago I had contemplated congratulating you on the vast improvement.

Your illustrations continue to be just about tops in the field, thanks to the presence of Finlay, but your covers just never seem to change—one flop after another. Again we must face facts.

If any of your readers need some back issues of SS or TWS from the 1940's, I have quite a few dupes and am willing to trade or sell them. I also have copies of other stf mags. —*277 Howland Avenue, River Edge, New Jersey.*

Gerry, please go away and face your own dirty old facts and leave us alone with ours—which are narsty enough. Seriously, we hope you approve our November and January issues a trifle less vitriolically. Gad, man!

Which brings us once more to the finale—and if it is a shorter column than in recent years, we trust it is less full of rambling dull splotches, unfunny doggerel and humor and can be read without a magnifying glass. Let's see a flock of provocative notes for our March and May editions.

—THE EDITOR.

NEXT ISSUE'S FEATURED NOVEL

THE STARMEN OF LLYRDIS by LEIGH BRACKETT

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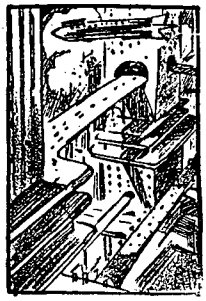

REVIEW OF THE CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION FAN PUBLICATIONS

SOMETHING that is new to us in the fanzine field has appeared with the publication of the inaugural issue of THE FANZINE EDITOR, published by Lee D. Quinn, Box No. 1199, Grand Central Station, New York 17, New York. It is published quarterly, is forwarded free to all fanzine editors and publishers and purports to give them advice as needed or requested on everything from how not to publish a fanzine (Spacewarp by Art Rapp) to how to handle an electric typer (by Betsy and Ed Curtis of Cricket fame).

Since the lineup on the editorial masthead looks mighty hep fanzine-wise, THE FANZINE EDITOR may prove to be a useful and, we hope, a long-lived manual. There is a good editorial if hardly financial idea behind it. We hope it stays afloat.

Down-Under Fandom

Also making a first appearance is WOOMERA, another Australian fan effort, edited by Nick Solntseff and Michael McGuiness at 184 Girraween Road, Girraween NSW, Australia. It is a thin and unpretentious little job that rates attention if only because of the stubbornness of Down-Under fandom in staying alive and kicking despite numberless vicissitudes caused by magazine and paper bans and the like. We hope some of you U. S. fans will manage to give it the support it merits.

Then the recent NORWESCON managed to get out a neat convention booklet under the aegis of Jerry Waible, 1219 NE Roswlawn Street, Portland 11, Oregon. Judging by the membership listed the convention was a huge success.

The Ten Best

And now to the ten best of the current crop. There are some extremely intriguing improvements on hand as will be duly noted and lauded. And so we begin our alphabetical listing with—

FANTASY ADVERTISER, 1745 Kenneth Road, Glendale 1, California. Editor, Roy A. Squires. Published bi-monthly. 15c per copy, 75c per annum.

The current issue of this must for stf collectors and swap artists is headlighted by Henry Kuttner's thoughtful essay on the current popularity and probable future development of stf and Malcolm M. Ferguson's guide to the works of great Anglofantasist M. P. Shiel. Artwork, editorial, book reviews and advertisements all up to previous high quality.

FANTASY TIMES, 137-05 32nd Avenue, Flushing, New York. Editor, James V. Taurasi. Published twice monthly. 10c per copy, 12 copies $1.00.

Still hitting on all sixteen as an stf newszine, FT manages almost every issue to come up with a fat supply of nuggets of unexpected "inside" information in not only fan but professional publishing circles. It must take a whale of an effort to keep it up to snuff but it is a pleasure to read and report on.

ORB, P. O. Box #941, Greeley, Colorado. Editor, Bob Johnson. Published quarterly. Price subject to change.

Probably the most exquisite printing job (No. 6, that is) ever seen outside of the lavender-scented sanctora of Fleur Cowles herself. This is a job of superb technique, of messed-up organization and odd contrasts in material used that baffles pat description. The cover is the best ever seen in fandom by this reviewer. And the presentation of The Laughing Satyr, a poem by Henry Andrew Ackerman, is a gorgeous bit of creative topography turned to bathos by the eclectic juvenality of the poem itself. On the whole a likable and certainly an arresting bouillabaise.

GARGOYLE, 1526 East 23rd Street, Brooklyn 10, New York. Editor, Michael DeAngelis. Published irregularly. No price listed.

A neat new little 'zine devoted entirely to reprinting from the works of August Derleth, Sauk City's second writing sage. You either like Derleth or you don't—perhaps, like us, you like some and dislike other portions. Interesting.

RHODOMAGNETIC DIGEST, 2524 Telegraph Avenue, Berkeley 4, California. Editor, Donald Baker Moore. Published bi-monthly. 25c per copy, 10 copies $2.25.

Most recent issue probably best to date with addition of good artwork and copy anent the publishing society's first annual dinner and stf award (to one R. Bradbury). George Blumenson takes one of our competitors to task for recent trends and Leland Sapiro heads a symposium approach to modern pulp trends in stf. Also present in good order—J. Francis McComas, Don L. Fabun, J. Lloyd Eaton, Editor Moore and others. Good live and occasionally controversial stuff, well rendered

SCIENCE, FANTASY, AND SCIENCE FICTION, 13 Gp/ RPC, BOAR 23, c/o GPO England. Editor, Captain Kenneth F. Slater. Published quarterly. 20c per copy, 75c per annum.

Despite a disastrous cover libel of Lois Miles as Miss Cinconvention, 1949, this is another good job from Slater. A pot pourri, it contains everything from the editor's theorizings and "Problems of Space" to story mit pix of various US fan meetings last year, fiction by Lin Carter and Lawrence Sandfield and a flock of articles and reviews by folk like Forrie Ackerman, Sam Moskowitz and Lillith Lorraine. Sprenger and Abas have supplied excellent illustrations.

SLANT, 170 Upper Newtonards Road, Belfast, Northern Ireland. Editor, Walter A. Willis. Published irregularly. 11c per copy.

Behind a truly brilliant cover with fine three-color insert (?) lies the best issue of this alien corn to date. Manly

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Banister, not unknown to American fans, comes up with a pseudo (love that word!) space-flight report and gets profile treatment later on in the 'zine. Clive Jackson, H. Ken Bulmer and Cedric Walker contribute good fanfiction, Geoffrey Cobbe not so good. Articles are brief almost to filler but reasonably interesting, artwork actually artistic if muddy where reproduction has slipped. All in all a nice job.

SPEARHEAD, 817 Starling Avenue, Martinsville, Virginia. Editor. Thomas H. Carter. Published quarterly. No price listed.

Quite an achievement. Dr. Keller leads off with a fascinating essay on catastrophe stories, is followed by poetry under the authorship of August Derleth, E. E. Cummings, Stanton Coblentz, Lillith Lorraine, Joe Kennedy and others, followed in turn by Tony Boucher's review of Bradbury's **Martian Chronicles.** (Mr. Boucher is definitely for them, as are we ourselves, for which hurrah!).

THE TALISMAN, P. O. Box #3224, Columbia Heights Station, Washington 10, D. C. Editor, Roy W. Loan, Jr. Published bi-monthly. 20c per copy, 6 copies $1.00.

Thoughtful, almost scholarly in tone, despite a murky last-place serial by D. R. Smith. Running right through otherwise, Seabury Quinn tackles the place of the weird and occult in stf, Philip N. Bridges delves intriguingly into the origins and correct usages of astral terminology and Phil Rasch tackles both Spengler and Toynbee, bringing the latter to earth on the five-yard line. Book reviews are brief but adequate.

UTOPIAN, 111 South 15th Street, Corsicana, Texas. Editor, R. J. Banks. Published irregularly. 25c per copy.

A step-up from the also-rans, featuring a meaty Q-&-A interview with Dr. Keller, Lee D. Quinn's previously independently-published column, poems by Alan Grant, Eva Firestone and Editor Banks—and a plethora of pretty typical fanfiction by Banks, Ken Slater, Neil Wood, L. D. Ayen, Banks, Banks and Wood. A little application of the old Kutternpseudonym psalve would do no harm to the contents page. But all in all a great improvement over the previous edition.

Well, that is *our* top ten. Also received and acknowledged with thanks—

AMOEBA, 146 East 12th, Eugene, Oregon. Editor, Norman E. Hartman. Published irregularly. No price listed.

BABEL, 415 Simpson Avenue, Aberdeen, Washington. Editor, T. Daniel. Published monthly. No price listed.

BEELZEBULB, 1455 Townsend Avenue, New York 52, New York. Editor, Morton D. Paly. Published irregularly. No price listed.

DAWN, 203 Wampum Avenue, Louisville, Kentucky. Editor, Russell K. Watkins. Published bi-monthly. 10c per copy.

DESTINY, 545 NE San Ragael, Portland 12, Oregon. Editors, Jim Bradley & Malcolm Willits. Published quarterly. 10c per copy, 40c per annum

EXPLORER, Girard, Pennsylvania. Editor, Ed. Noble Jr. Published bi-monthly. 10c per copy, 50c per annum.

EUSIFANO, 146 East 12th Street, Eugene, Oregon. Editor, D. R. Fraser. Published monthly. 10c per copy, $1.00 per annum.

FAN-FARE, 119 Ward Road, North Tonawanda, New York. Editor, W. Paul Ganley. Published bi-monthly. 65c per annum.

FANTASM, 43 Tremont Street, Malden 48, Massachusetts. Editor, L. R. Campbell. Published irregularly. 5c per copy.

IMPOSSIBLE, 3933 15th Avenue, Seattle 5, Washington. Editor, Burnett R. Tosky Published bi-monthly. 10c per copy.

INCINERATIONS, 9109 S.W. Oleson Road, Portland 19, Oregon. Editor, unlisted. Published quarterly. 10c per copy, 10 copies $1.00.

THE JOURNAL OF SPACE FLIGHT, 10630 South St. Louis Avenue, Chicago 43, Illinois. Editor, Wayne Proell. Published 10 times per annum. 25c per copy.

ODD, 1302 Lester Street, Poplar Bluff, Missouri. Editor, Duggie Fisher, Jr. Published bi-monthly. 10c per copy.

PEON, 402 Bristol Street, Moanalua Housing, Honolulu 18, T. H. Editor, Charles Lee Riddle, PM1, USN. Published bi-monthly. 9 copies $1.00.

S-F NEWSSCOPE, 43 Tremont Street, Malden 48, Massachusetts. Editor, Lawrence H. Campbell. Published monthly. 5c per copy, 50c per annum.

SHIVERS, 230 Prince Street, Bridgeport 8, Connecticut. Editor, H. S. Weatherby, HM1, USN. Published quarterly. 10c per copy.

SKYLARK, 1047 Louisa Street, Elizabeth, New Jersey. Editor, Sid Gluck. Published irregularly. No price listed.

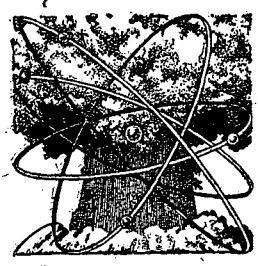
SPACEWARP, 1057 South Normandie Avenue, Los Angeles 6, California. Editor, S. Charles Burbee. Published monthly. 15c per copy, 4 copies 50c.

WESTERN STAR, 1534 Grant Avenue, San Francisco 11, California. Editor, Jim Kepner. Published twice monthly .5c per copy, 12 copies 50c.

With which, after almost forgetting in what state of the alleged union San Francisco is to be found, we'll call it a day. On the whole, a very good crop this time. Hope you can keep it up.

—THE EDITOR.

THREE WHO SURVIVED



WITH Earth a blazing globe in the sky thanks to Man's folly, three persons manage to live through the crash of one space-ship that escaped the holocaust of the home planet. Marooned on Mars are Thomas Jefferson Johns, Nobel prize-winner for literature, Malatesta, the ex-racketeer whose organizing genius made flight from Earth possible — and Madge, last living human woman.

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For this story of the second world of Man look forward to THE TWO SHADOWS, a novelet by William F. Temple, in the next issue of STARTLING STORIES.

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SCIENCE FICTION BOOKSHELF

REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

BIG BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION edited by Groff Conklin, Crown Publishers, New York ($3.00).

This, the third in the Crown anthologies assembled and introduced by Mr. Conklin, is another whopping money's worth, in line with its predecessors, THE BEST OF SCIENCE FICTION (1946) and a TREASURY OF SCIENCE FICTION (1948). It contains a total of 32 short stories and novelets in its 545 pages, which tales are

ivided into six definitive sections in the ame of book organization.

Part One, dealing with "Inventions, Dangerous and Otherwise", is the briefest of hese and, for our money, its top story is MATTER OF FORM, culled from the oderately distant past of author Horace . Gold. Part Two, concerned with "Wonders of Earth and of Man," is headlined by atherine MacLean's DEFENSE MECHAISM and Lewis Padgett's MARGIN FOR RROR. Part Three, "From Outer Space," nds Theodore Sturgeon's MEWHU'S JET nd Graham Doar's THE OUTER LIMIT mong a sextet of all-star entries.

In Part Four, which tells of "Adventures Dimension," to us at any rate the top b by some distance was T. L. Sherred's FOR EFFORT, while Part Five—"Far raveling"—finds Fletcher Pratt, Clifford imak and Fredric Brown present with HE ROGER BACON FORMULA, DEERTION and ARENA respectively. In the nal section, a symposium on "World of

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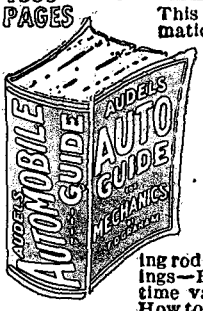

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Tomorrow," we meet first with the old master, Jules Verne himself, followed by Messrs Bradbury, MacDonald, Leiber, Kornbluth and Knight. Of the stories we liked Cyril Kornbluth's THE ONLY THING WE LEARN the best, perhaps because it ran in TWS.

However, these selections are purely a matter of personal preference and anyone who knows the infinitude of splinterism among stfans will be aware that probably no other reader will pick the same favorites save by the famed "fifty million monkeys" coincidence. But the stories are there in the book for everyone.

THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES 1950, edited by Everett F. Bleiler & T. E. Dikty, Frederick Fell, New York ($2.95).

The second edition of what seems plotted as an annual selection contains a good deal of interesting and entertaining material, as must any volume replete with the works of Ray Bradbury, Murray Leinster, Fredric Brown, Henry Kuttner, Will F. Jenkins, Theodore Sturgeon, Clifford Simak, John D. MacDonald, Robert Moore Williams and so on to the number of thirteen stories, some moderately long.

However the inclusion of Bradbury twice and Jenkins likewise (once as Leinster) actually cuts down the authors picked to eleven, which we feel adds to what must of necessity already be a somewhat arbitrary choice. For fine work was done last year by at least twice that many unpicked authors.

None the less the volume is a worthwhile stf item, especially since it does in a way present an annual picture of what goes on in the field—at least in part. We found Jenkins' DOOMSDAY DEFERRED the most impressive bit of story telling in the volume although the others were uniformly good. And Vincent Starrett, the old mystery maestro, has contributed an amiable introduction.

SHADOWS OF ECSTASY by Charles Williams, Pellegrini & Cudahy, New York ($3.00).

It is a pleasure, even posthumously, to welcome into the ranks of speculative fiction an author who numbered, before his death a half dozen years ago, such distinguished folk of letters as T. S. Eliot, Dorothy Sayers and C. S. Lewis, among his sponsors. For this novel represents a level of thought, culture, scholarship and all-around writing class that modern fantasy sees too seldom.

Written throughout with a classic irony that verges on the esoteric, it concerns itself with a revolt of Africa against Europe as seen through the eyes of an oddly-assorted group of men and women in London. It is a revolt of pure primitive emotion against the entire Socratic and Christian doctrines of reason and intellect and rigidly controlled faith.

Perhaps this sounds like a far cry from science fiction—but it is not. For in its study of the reverse-coin of hypnotism, of the conquest of death through sheer power of human emotion, in the impact of such primitivism upon what is perhaps the highest level of Western culture still extant, this is science fantasy itself at a very high level. We hope Mr. Williams' last work finds plenty of stf as well as more generally inclined readers.

RALPH 124C 41 by Hugo Gernsback, Frederick Fell, New York ($2.50).

This odd little volume is truly a cullback from the grave of stf primitives. First penned by the so-called "father of science fiction" for his own radio magazine back in 1911, RALPH dips into the future world of 2660 A. D. in the person of its titular hero, perhaps the most faceless superman every known to gadgetory fiction.

For RALPH is a book of gadgets pure and simple—a book in which characterization is non-existent, plot reduced to childish simplicity and reader interest, save for that somewhat intellectual dubiosity who likes to tinker with tools in the basement, maintained close to absolute zero.

In a pair of laudatory introductions, Lee De Forest, the radio-electronics wizard, and Fletcher Pratt, science fantasy author and military-naval expert, go into rhapsodies over its "prophetic" qualities. At that we guess RALPH is okay—if it's gadgets you're after in stf. It is certainly the direct antithesis of Charles Williams' novel.

GENUS HOMO by L. Sprague de Camp & P. Schuyler Miller, Fantasy Press, Reading, Pennsylvania ($3.00)

Some years ago, when we read John Steinbeck's THE WAYWARD BUS, we found ourselves, while fascinated by that fine author's interplay of character in a bizarre situation, definitely sensing that something was lacking in the story elements. Now, after reading GENUS HOMO we believe we have found it. Mr. Steinbeck simply did not make his situation

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bizarre enough. Messrs de Camp and Miller have.

Their bus is not merely driven off-highway by an impulsive driver sick of the endless route and routine of his job—it is caught in an earthquake cave-in while still on its ordained highway and, through a series of generally plausible circumstances, sent highballing into the distant future with its passengers intact.

Upon emerging, its characters find themselves in a sort of posthistoric era from which Man has managed to eliminate himself completely. Intelligent anthropoid apes and super-beavers, dam them, run North America and most of the rest of the world and on the whole do a better job of it than mere humans ever managed.

There is a lot of fun in this one, as in everything to which Mr. de Camp has turned his hand, as well as much that is thought provoking and dramatic. It may not be literature but it's swell stf.

THE VOYAGE OF THE SPACE BEAGLE by A. E. van Vogt, Simon and Schuster, New York ($2.50).

This is an assemblage of interspatial BEMs, based on the author's famed THE BLACK DESTROYER and DISCORD IN SCARLET interspersed with other unlikely occupants of alien planets and galaxies as encountered by those aboard the Beagle, a space-exploration vessel sent out to probe mankind's cosmic surroundings.

Although the carnage is appalling among crew members as the various monsters do their matter-changing stuff, dramatic interest, for us at any rate, was held at a low level by the repetitiousness of incident that seems to assail all such collections in one binding, going back to George O. Smith's VENUS EQUILATERAL.

The hero, a co-ordinator of scientific specializations, has the usual time winning respect for his new branch of learning but winds up running the show in true Admirable Chrichton fashion. This book can be wholeheartedly if solely recommended to all BEM-lovers.

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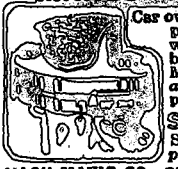
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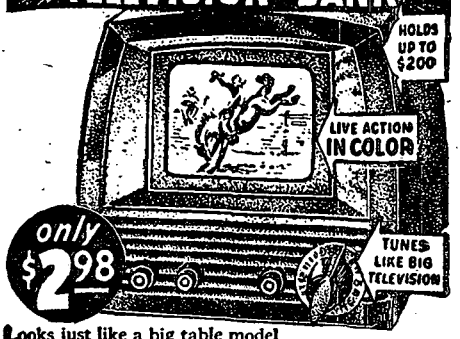

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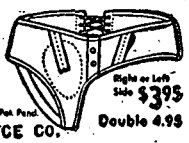

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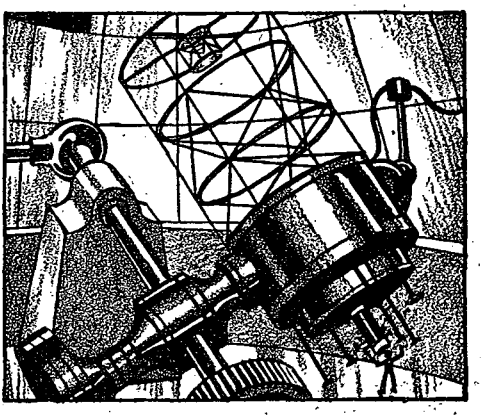

LOOKING AHEAD

A Forecast of Good Reading

FOR its March issue STARTLING STORIES will lead off with a brilliantly and excitingly colorful novel by Leigh Brackett, THE STARMEN OF LLYRDIS. In this, her newest science fiction story Miss Brackett forsakes her previously favorite background of Mars in favor of both Earth and the sweep of the whole galaxy.

It tells of a modern man, an American, who feels not quite one with his fellows and is curiously drawn along a far ancestral trail to an isolated section of Britany, where for the first time he encounters men and a woman who not only resemble him strangely physically but seem to accept him as a member of some highly secret fraternity.

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These he discovers, almost at the cost of his life, are the Vardda, sole living species that is physically able to withstand the terrific strain of star travel, the secret traders of the stars who have created a tight galactic monopoly out of their unique bodily endowments.

He himself is half Vardda and discovers that he is a reversion to the full Vardda strength when, having learned too much about them as a result of his resemblance he is kidnaped and forced to endure the

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colossal pressures of star travel himself.

From then on he finds himself a man in conflict—battling a sense of treachery to mankind even while unsure of his allegiance to his new-found fellows. And while, slowly, he forges the only path of progress that he can follow, a tremendous second conflict of intrigue and counter-intrigue comes to revolve about him.

Miss Brackett has here written a space-opera supreme—one which the lovers of more practical pseudo-science will find convincing even while the more adventurous have opportunity to drink their fill. THE STARMEN OF LLYRDIS is a massively stirring story which maintains a tight grip on reality even while it soars to the furthest sars.

A Futuremen Novelet

Captain Future will be back with EARTHMEN NO MORE, by Edmond Hamilton, a fine novelet in the current series. In this one the futuremen rescue a

[*Turn page*]

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wrecked wayfarer who has been deep-frozen in space since the time of the earliest pioneer voyages to the other planets of Sol.

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EARTHMEN NO MORE is a singularly human story as well as a splendid novelet of space and the men who follow its roadways.

Twin Suns

March in SS will also see a brilliant novelet entitled THE TWO SHADOWS, by William F. Temple. The two shadows are those cast on Mars by the new twin suns—Sol and a fissionized Earth. And on Mars, thanks to unforeseen disaster, are three survivors of the one space-ship which escaped to crash on the Red Planet—a Nobel Prize poetry winner, the descendent of an Italian bootlegger and one woman, a former nurse.

There, among the three of them, the

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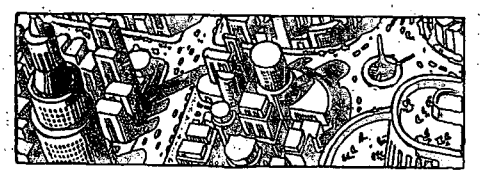
entire basic human conflict and survival are resolved—in terms and action that comprise a rich full meal of a story of ideas and suspense. THE TWO SHADOWS is the sort of story that must linger with the reader a long time after its final page is turned.

The current short story roster, from which this important complement will be selected at present comprises John Benyon, Fredric Brown, Cleve Cartmill, Stanton M. Coblentz, L. Sprague de Camp, David Dryfoos, Horace B. Fyfe, Raymond Z. Gallun, J. W. Groves, Charles L. Harness, Allen K. Lang, Mat Lee, Frank Belknap Long, Laurence Manning, Chad Oliver, Mack Reynolds, Margaret St. Clair, Carter Sprague, William Tenn, Jack Vance and Robert Moore Williams, which should make for good reading all around.

—THE EDITOR.



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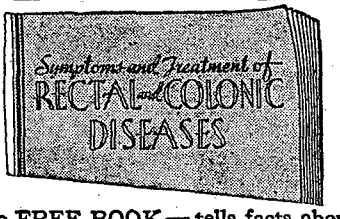

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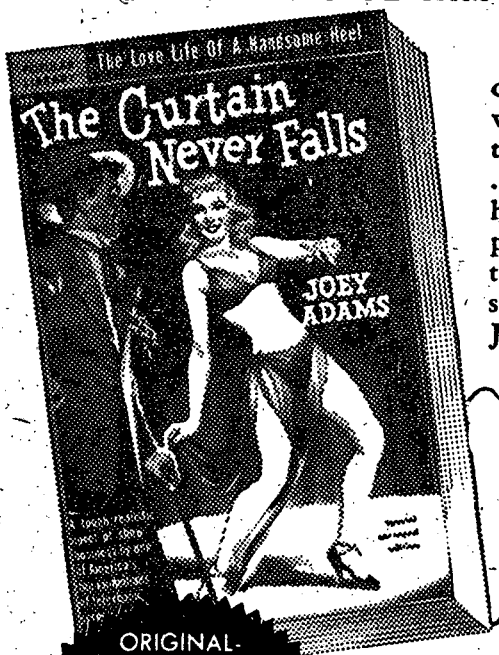

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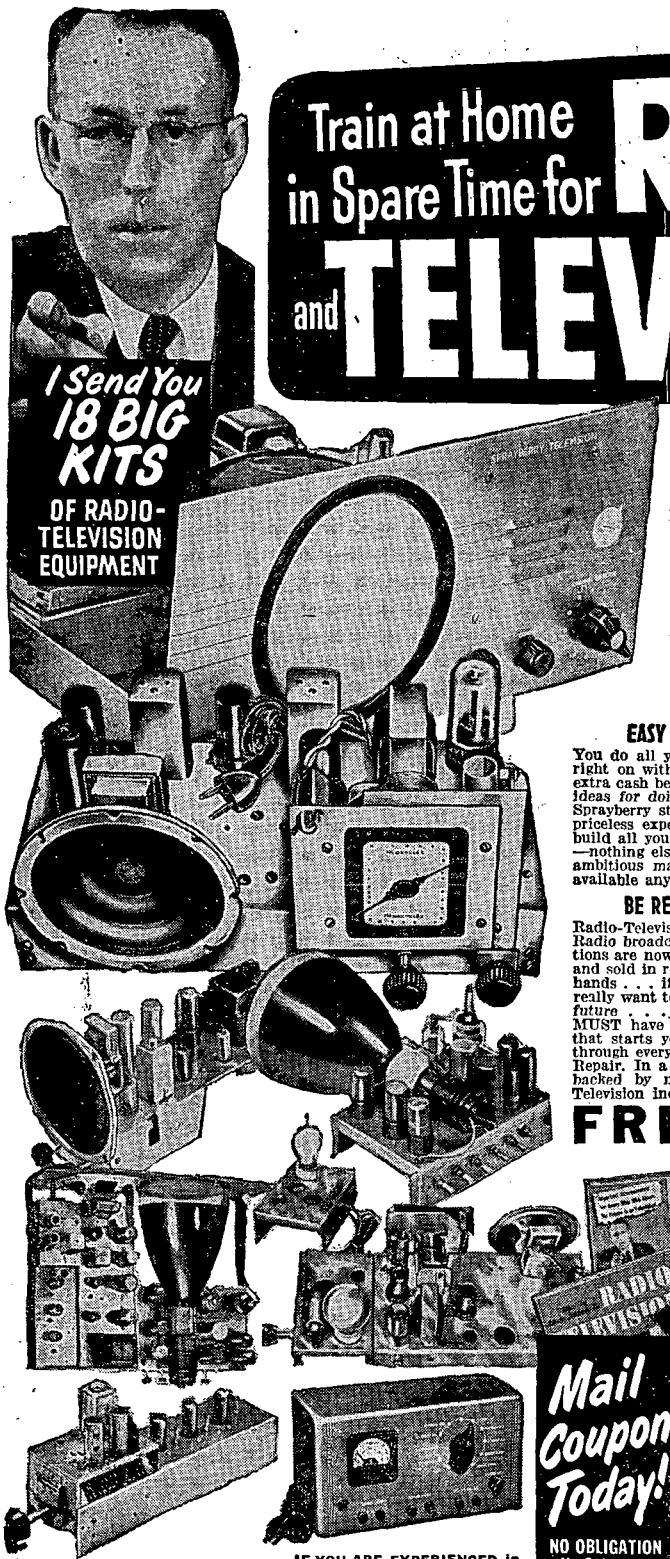

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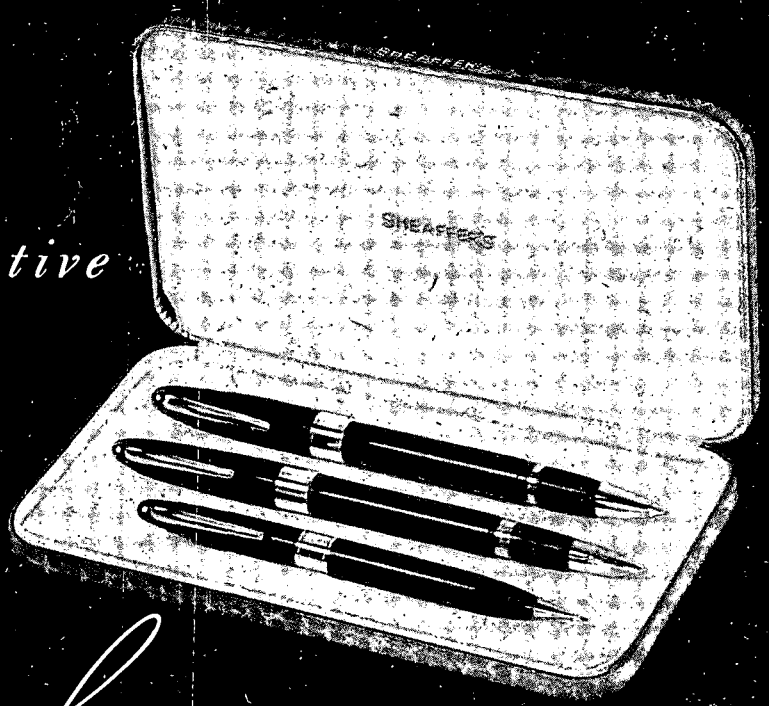

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